NEVER-FAIL BLAKE

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"The Silver Poppy," "Phantom Wires," "Are All Men Alike and The Lost Titian," "The Door of Dread," "The Man Who Couldn't Sleep," "The Prairie Child," "The Prairie Mother," "The Prairie Wife," The Wine of Life," "The Wire Tappers," etc.

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I

BLAKE, the Second Deputy, raised his gloomy hound's eyes as the door opened and a woman stepped in. Then he dropped them again.

"Hello, Elsie!" he said, without looking at her.

The woman stood a moment staring at him. Then she advanced thoughtfully toward his table desk.

"Hello, Jim!" she answered, as she sank into the empty chair at the desk end. The rustling of silk suddenly ceased. An aphrodisiac odor of ambergris crept through the Deputy-Commissioner's office.

The woman looped up her veil, festooning it about the undulatory roll of her hat brim.

Blake continued his solemnly preoccupied study of the desk top.

"You sent for me," the woman finally said. It was more a reminder than a question. And the voice, for all its quietness, carried no sense of timidity. The woman's pale face, where the undulating hat brim left the shadowy eyes still more shadowy, seemed fortified with a calm sense of power. It was something more than a dormant consciousness of beauty, though the knowledge that men would turn back to a face so wistful as hers, and their judgment could be dulled by a smile so narcotizing, had not a little to do with the woman's achieved serenity. There was nothing outwardly sinister about her. This fact had always left her doubly dangerous as a lawbreaker.

Blake himself, for all his dewlap and his two hundred pounds of lethargic beefiness, felt a vague and inward stirring as he finally lifted his head and looked at her. He looked into the shadowy eyes under the level brows. He could see, as he had seen before, that they were

exceptional eyes, with iris rings of deep gray about the ever-widening and ever-narrowing pupils which varied with varying thought, as though set too close to the brain that controlled them. So dominating was this pupil that sometimes the whole eye looked violet, and sometimes green, according to the light.

Then his glance strayed to the woman's mouth, where the upper lip curved outward, from the base of the straight nose, giving her at first glance the appearance of pouting. Yet the heavier underlip, soft and wilful, contradicted this impression of peevishness, deepened it into one of Ishmael-like rebellion.

Then Blake looked at the woman's hair. It was abundant and nut-brown, and artfully and scrupulously interwoven and twisted together. It seemed to stand the solitary pride of a life claiming few things of which to be proud. Blake remembered how that wealth of nut-brown hair was daily plaited and treasured and coiled and cared for, the meticulous attentiveness with which morning by morning its hip-reaching abundance was braided and

twisted and built up about the small head, an intricate structure of soft wonder which midnight must ever see again in ruins, just as the next morning would find idly laborious fingers rebuilding its ephemeral glories. This rebuilding was done thoughtfully and calmly, as though it were a religious rite, as though it were a sacrificial devotion to an ideal in a life tragically forlorn of beauty.

He remembered, too, the day when he had first seen her. That was at the time of "The Sick Millionaire" case, when he had first learned of her association with Binhart. She had posed at the Waldorf as a trained nurse, in that case, and had met him and held him off and outwitted him at every turn. Then he had decided on his "plant." To effect this he had whisked a young Italian with a lacerated thumb up from the City Hospital and sent him in to her as an injured elevator-boy looking for first-aid treatment. One glimpse of her work on that thumb showed her to be betrayingly ignorant of both figure-of-eight and spica bandaging, and Blake, finally satisfied as

to the imposture, carried on his investigation, showed "Doctor Callahan" to be Connie Binhart, the con-man and bank thief, and sent the two adventurers scurrying away to shelter.

He remembered, too, how seven months after that first meeting Stimson of the Central Office had brought her to Headquarters, fresh from Paris, involved in some undecipherable way in an Aix-les-Bains diamond robbery. The despatches had given his office very little to work on, and she had smiled at his thunderous grillings and defied his noisy threats. But as she sat there before him, chic and guarded, with her girlishly frail body so arrogantly well gowned, she had in some way touched his lethargic imagination. She showed herself to be of finer and keener fiber than the sordid demireps with whom he had to do. Shimmering and saucy and debonair as a polo pony, she had seemed a departure from type, something above the meretricious termagants round whom he so often had to weave his accusatory webs of evidence.

Then, the following autumn, she was still

again mysteriously involved in the Sheldon wire-tapping coup. This Montreal banker named Sheldon, from whom nearly two hundred thousand dollars had been wrested, put a bullet through his head rather than go home disgraced, and she had straightway been brought down to Blake, for, until the autopsy and the production of her dupe's letters, Sheldon's death had been looked upon as a murder.

Blake had locked himself in with the white-faced Miss Elsie Verriner, alias Chaddy Cravath, alias Charlotte Carruthers, and for three long hours he had pitted his dynamic brute force against her flashing and snake-like evasiveness. He had pounded her with the artillery of his inhumanities. He had beleaguered her with explosive brutishness. He had bulldozed and harried her into frantic weariness. He had third-degreed her into cowering and trembling indignation, into hectic mental uncertainties. Then, with the fatigue point well passed, he had marshaled the last of his own animal strength and essayed the final blasphemous Vesuvian onslaught that brought about

the nervous breakdown, the ultimate collapse. She had wept, then, the blubbering, loose-lipped, abandoned weeping of hysteria. She had stumbled forward and caught at his arm and clung to it, as though it were her last earthly pillar of support. Her huge plaited ropes of hair had fallen down, thick brown ropes longer than his own arms, and he, breathing hard, had sat back and watched them as she wept.

But Blake was neither analytical nor introspective. How it came about he never quite knew. He felt, after his blind and inarticulate fashion, that this scene of theirs, that this official assault and surrender, was in some way associated with the climacteric transports of camp-meeting evangelism, that it involved strange nerve-centers touched on in rhapsodic religions, that it might even resemble the final emotional surrender of reluctant love itself to the first aggressive tides of passion. What it was based on, what it arose from, he could not say. But in the flood-tide of his own tumultuous conquest he had watched her abandoned

weeping and her tumbled brown hair. And as he watched, a vague and troubling tingle sped like a fuse-sputter along his limbs, and fired something dormant and dangerous in the great hulk of a body which had never before been stirred by its explosion of emotion. It was not pity, he knew; for pity was something quite foreign to his nature. Yet as she lay back, limp and forlorn against his shoulder, sobbing weakly out that she wanted to be a good woman, that she could be honest if they would only give her a chance, he felt that thus to hold her, to shield her, was something desirable.

She had stared, weary and wide-eyed, as his head had bent closer down over hers. She had drooped back, bewildered and unresponsive, as his heavy lips had closed on hers that were still wet and salty with tears. When she had left the office, at the end of that strange hour, she had gone with the promise of his protection.

The sobering light of day, with its cynic relapse to actualities, might have left that promise a worthless one, had not the prompt evi-

dence of Sheldon's suicide come to hand. This made Blake's task easier than he had expected. The movement against Elsie Verriner was "smothered" at Headquarters. Two days later she met Blake by appointment. That day, for the first time in his life, he gave flowers to a woman.

Two weeks later he startled her with the declaration that he wanted to marry her. He did n't care about her past. She 'd been dragged into the things she 'd done without understanding them, at first, and she 'd kept on because there 'd been no one to help her away from them. He knew he could do it. She had a fine streak in her, and he wanted to bring it out!

A little frightened, she tried to explain that she was not the marrying kind. Then, brick-red and bull-necked, he tried to tell her in his groping Celtic way that he wanted children, that she meant a lot to him, that he was going to try to make her the happiest woman south of Harlem.

This had brought into her face a quick and

dangerous light which he found hard to explain. He could see that she was flattered by what he had said, that his words had made her waywardly happy, that for a moment, in fact, she had been swept off her feet.

Then dark afterthought interposed. It crept like a cloud across her abandoned face. It brought about a change so prompt that it disturbed the Second Deputy.

"You 're—you 're not tied up already, are you?" he had hesitatingly demanded. "You 're not married?"

"No, I 'm not tied up!" she had promptly and fiercely responded. "My life 's my own —my own!"

"Then why can't you marry me?" the practical-minded man had asked.

"I could!" she had retorted, with the same fierceness as before. Then she had stood looking at him out of wistful and unhappy eyes. "I could—if you only understood, if you could only help me the way I want to be helped!"

She had clung to his arm with a tragic forlornness that seemed to leave her very wan and

helpless. And he had found it ineffably sweet to enfold that warm mass of wan helplessness in his own virile strength.

She asked for time, and he was glad to consent to the delay, so long as it did not keep him from seeing her. In matters of the emotions he was still as uninitiated as a child. He found himself a little dazed by the seemingly accidental tenderness, by the promises of devotion, in which she proved so lavish. Morning by jocund morning he built up his airy dreams, as carefully as she built up her nut-brown plaits. He grew heavily light-headed with his plans for the future. When she pleaded with him never to leave her, never to trust her too much, he patted her thin cheek and asked when she was going to name the day. From that finality she still edged away, as though her happiness itself were only experimental, as though she expected the blue sky above them to deliver itself of a bolt.

But by this time she had become a habit with him. He liked her even in her moodiest moments. When, one day, she suggested that

they go away together, anywhere so long as it was away, he merely laughed at her childishness.

It was, in fact, Blake himself who went away. After nine weeks of alternating suspense and happiness that seemed nine weeks of inebriation to him, he was called out of the city to complete the investigation on a series of iron-workers' dynamite outrages. Daily he wrote or wired back to her. But he was kept away longer than he had expected. When he returned to New York she was no longer there. She had disappeared as completely as though an asphalted avenue had opened and swallowed her up. It was not until the following winter that he learned she was again with Connie Binhart, in southern Europe.

He had known his one belated love affair. It had left no scar, he claimed, because it had made no wound. Binhart, he consoled himself, had held the woman in his power: there had been no defeat because there had been no actual conquest. And now he could face her without an eye-blink of conscious embarrass-

ment. Yet it was good to remember that Connie Binhart was going to be ground in the wheels of the law, and ground fine, and ground to a finish.

"What did you want me for, Jim?" the woman was again asking him. She spoke with an intimate directness, and yet in her attitude were subtle reservations, a consciousness of the thin ice on which they both stood. Each saw, only too plainly, the need for great care, in every step. In each lay the power to uncover, at a hand's turn, old mistakes that were best unremembered. Yet there was a certain suave audacity about the woman. She was not really afraid of Blake, and the Second Deputy had to recognize that fact. This self-assurance of hers he attributed to the recollection that she had once brought about his personal subjugation, "got his goat," as he had phrased it. She, woman-like, would never forget it.

"There 's a man I want. And Schmittenberg tells me you know where he is." Blake, as he spoke, continued to look heavily down at his desk top.

"Yes?" she answered cautiously, watching herself as carefully as an actress with a rôle to sustain, a rôle in which she could never be quite letter-perfect.

"It 's Connie Binhart," cut out the Second Deputy.

He could see discretion drop like a curtain across her watching face.

"Connie Binhart!" she temporized. Blake, as his heavy side glance slewed about to her, prided himself on the fact that he could see through her pretenses. At any other time he would have thrown open the flood-gates of that ever-inundating anger of his and swept away all such obliquities.

"I guess," he went on with slow patience, "we know him best round here as Charles Blanchard."

"Blanchard?" she echoed.

"Yes, Blanchard, the Blanchard we 've been looking for, for seven months now, the Blanchard who chloroformed Ezra Newcomb and carried off a hundred and eighteen thousand dollars."

"Newcomb?" again meditated the woman.

"The Blanchard who shot down the bank detective in Newcomb's room when the rest of the bank was listening to a German band playing in the side street, a band hired for the occasion."

"When was that?" demanded the woman.

"That was last October," he answered with a sing-song weariness suggestive of impatience at such supererogative explanations.

"I was at Monte Carlo all last autumn," was the woman's quick retort.

Blake moved his heavy body, as though to shoulder away any claim as to her complicity.

"I know that," he acknowledged. "And you went north to Paris on the twenty-ninth of November. And on the third of December you went to Cherbourg; and on the ninth you landed in New York. I know all that. That 's not what I 'm after. I want to know where Connie Binhart is, now, to-day."

Their glances at last came together. No move was made; no word was spoken. But a contest took place.

"Why ask *me?*" repeated the woman for the second time. It was only too plain that she was fencing.

"Because you *know,*" was Blake's curt retort. He let the gray-irised eyes drink in the full cup of his determination. Some slowly accumulating consciousness of his power seemed to intimidate her. He could detect a change in her bearing, in her speech itself.

"Jim, I can't tell you," she slowly asserted. "I can't do it!"

"But I 've got 'o know," he stubbornly maintained. "And I 'm going to."

She sat studying him for a minute or two. Her face had lost its earlier arrogance. It seemed troubled; almost touched with fear. She was not altogether ignorant, he reminded himself, of the resources which he could command.

"I can't tell you," she repeated. "I 'd rather you let me go."

The Second Deputy's smile, scoffing and melancholy, showed how utterly he ignored

her answer. He looked at his watch. Then he looked back at the woman. A nervous tug-of-war was taking place between her right and left hand, with a twisted-up pair of ecru gloves for the cable.

"You know me," he began again in his deliberate and abdominal bass. "And I know you. I 've got 'o get this man Binhart. I 've got 'o! He 's been out for seven months, now, and they 're going to put it up to me, to *me,* personally. Copeland tried to get him without me. He fell down on it. They all fell down on it. And now they 're going to throw the case back on me. They think it 'll be my Waterloo."

He laughed. His laugh was as mirthless as the cackle of a guinea hen. "But I 'm going to die hard, believe me! And if I go down, if they think they can throw me on that, I 'm going to take a few of my friends along with me."

"Is that a threat?" was the woman's quick inquiry. Her eyes narrowed again, for she had long since learned, and learned it to her

sorrow, that every breath he drew was a breath of self-interest.

"No; it 's just a plain statement." He slewed about in his swivel chair, throwing one thick leg over the other as he did so. "I hate to holler Auburn at a girl like you, Elsie; but I 'm going—"

"Auburn?" she repeated very quietly. Then she raised her eyes to his. "Can you say a thing like that to me, Jim?"

He shifted a little in his chair. But he met her gaze without a wince.

"This is business, Elsie, and you can't mix business and—and other things," he tailed off at last, dropping his eyes.

"I 'm sorry you put it that way," she said. "I hoped we 'd be better friends than that!"

"I 'm not counting on friendship in this!" he retorted.

"But it might have been better, even in this!" she said. And the artful look of pity on her face angered him.

"Well, we 'll begin on something nearer home!" he cried.

He reached down into his pocket and produced a small tinted oblong of paper. He held it, face out, between his thumb and forefinger, so that she could read it.

"This Steinert check 'll do the trick. Take a closer look at the signature. Do you get it?"

"What about it?" she asked, without a tremor.

He restored the check to his wallet and the wallet to his pocket. She would find it impossible to outdo him in the matter of impassivity.

"I may or I may not know who forged that check. I don't *want* to know. And when you tell me where Binhart is, I *won't* know."

"That check was n't forged," contended the quiet-eyed woman.

"Steinert will swear it was," declared the Second Deputy.

She sat without speaking, apparently in deep study. Her intent face showed no fear, no bewilderment, no actual emotion of any kind.

"You 've got 'o face it," said Blake, sitting back and waiting for her to speak. His attitude was that of a physician at a bedside, awaiting the prescribed opiate to produce its prescribed effect.

"Will I be dragged into this case, in any way, if Binhart is rounded up?" the woman finally asked.

"Not once," he asserted.

"You promise me that?"

"Of course," answered the Second Deputy.

"And you 'll let me alone on—on the other things?" she calmly exacted.

"Yes," he promptly acknowledged. "I 'll see that you 're let alone."

Again she looked at him with her veiled and judicial eyes. Then she dropped her hands into her lap. The gesture seemed one of resignation.

"Binhart 's in Montreal," she said.

Blake, keeping his face well under control, waited for her to go on.

"He 's been in Montreal for weeks now. You 'll find him at 381 King Edward Avenue,

in Westmount. He 's there, posing as an expert accountant."

She saw the quick shadow of doubt, the eye-flash of indecision. So she reached quietly down and opened her pocket-book, rummaging through its contents for a moment or two. Then she handed Blake a folded envelope.

"You know his writing?" she asked.

"I 've seen enough of it," he retorted, as he examined the typewritten envelope post-marked "Montreal, Que." Then he drew out the inner sheet. On it, written by pen, he read the message: "Come to 381 King Edward when the coast is clear," and below this the initials "C. B."

Blake, with the writing still before his eyes, opened a desk drawer and took out a large reading-glass. Through the lens of this he again studied the inscription, word by word. Then he turned to the office 'phone on his desk.

"Nolan," he said into the receiver, "I want to know if there 's a King Edward Avenue in Montreal."

He sat there waiting, still regarding the

handwriting with stolidly reproving eyes. There was no doubt of its authenticity. He would have known it at a glance.

"Yes, sir," came the answer over the wire. "It 's one of the newer avenues in Westmount."

Blake, still wrapped in thought, hung up the receiver. The woman facing him did not seem to resent his possible imputation of dishonesty. To be suspicious of all with whom he came in contact was imposed on him by his profession. He was compelled to watch even his associates, his operatives and underlings, his friends as well as his enemies. Life, with him, was a *concerto* of skepticisms.

She was able to watch him, without emotion, as he again bent forward, took up the 'phone receiver, and this time spoke apparently to another office.

"I want you to wire Teal to get a man out to cover 381 King Edward Avenue, in Montreal. Yes, Montreal. Tell him to get a man out there inside of an hour, and put a night watch on until I relieve 'em."

Then, breathing heavily, he bent over his desk, wrote a short message on a form pad and pushed the buzzer-button with his thick finger. He carefully folded up the piece of paper as he waited.

"Get that off to Carpenter in Montreal right away," he said to the attendant who answered his call. Then he swung about in his chair, with a throaty grunt of content. He sat for a moment, staring at the woman with unseeing eyes. Then he stood up. With his hands thrust deep in his pockets he slowly moved his head back and forth, as though assenting to some unuttered question.

"Elsie, you 're all right," he acknowledged with his solemn and unimaginative impassivity. "You 're all right."

Her quiet gaze, with all its reservations, was a tacit question. He was still a little puzzled by her surrender. He knew she did not regard him as the great man that he was, that his public career had made of him.

"You 've helped me out of a hole," he acknowledged as he faced her interrogating

eyes with his one-sided smile. "I 'm mighty glad you 've done it, Elsie—for your sake as well as mine."

"What hole?" asked the woman, wearily drawing on her gloves. There was neither open contempt nor indifference on her face. Yet something in her bearing nettled him. The quietness of her question contrasted strangely with the gruffness of the Second Deputy's voice as he answered her.

"Oh, they think I 'm a has-been round here," he snorted. "They 've got the idea I 'm out o' date. And I 'm going to show 'em a thing or two to wake 'em up."

"How?" asked the woman.

"By doing what their whole kid-glove gang have n't been able to do," he avowed. And having delivered himself of that ultimatum, he promptly relaxed into his old-time impassiveness, like a dog snapping from his kennel and shrinking back into its shadows. At the same moment that Blake's thick forefinger again prodded the buzzer-button at his desk end the watching woman could see the relapse

into official wariness. It was as though he had put the shutters up in front of his soul. She accepted the movement as a signal of dismissal. She rose from her chair and quietly lowered and adjusted her veil. Yet through that lowered veil she stood looking down at Never-Fail Blake for a moment or two. She looked at him with grave yet casual curiosity, as tourists look at a ruin that has been pointed out to them as historic.

"You did n't give me back Connie Binhart's note," she reminded him as she paused with her gloved finger-tips resting on the desk edge.

"D' you want it?" he queried with simulated indifference, as he made a final and lingering study of it.

"I 'd like to keep it," she acknowledged. When, without meeting her eyes, he handed it over to her, she folded it and restored it to her pocket-book, carefully, as though vast things depended on that small scrap of paper.

Never-Fail Blake, alone in his office and still assailed by the vaguely disturbing perfumes which she had left behind her, pondered her

reasons for taking back Binhart's scrap of paper. He wondered if she had at any time actually cared for Binhart. He wondered if she was capable of caring for anybody. And this problem took his thoughts back to the time when so much might have depended on its answer.

The Second Deputy dropped his reading-glass in its drawer and slammed it shut. It made no difference, he assured himself, one way or the other. And in the consolatory moments of a sudden new triumph Never-Fail Blake let his thoughts wander pleasantly back over that long life which (and of this he was now comfortably conscious) his next official move was about to redeem.

II

IT was as a Milwaukee newsboy, at the age of twelve, that "Jimmie" Blake first found himself in any way associated with that arm of constituted authority known as the police force. A plain-clothes man, on that occasion, had given him a two-dollar bill to carry about an armful of evening papers and at the same time "tail" an itinerant pickpocket. The fortifying knowledge, two years later, that the Law was behind him when he was pushed happy and tingling through a transom to release the door-lock for a house-detective, was perhaps a foreshadowing of that pride which later welled up in his bosom at the phrase that he would always "have United Decency behind him," as the social purifiers fell into the habit of putting it.

At nineteen, as a "checker" at the Upper Kalumet Collieries, Blake had learned to re-

member faces. Slavic or Magyar, Swedish or Calabrian, from that daily line of over two hundred he could always pick his face and correctly call the name. His post meant a life of indolence and petty authority. His earlier work as a steamfitter had been more profitable. Yet at that work he had been a menial; it involved no transom-born thrills, no street-corner tailer's suspense. As a checker he was at least the master of other men.

His public career had actually begun as a strike breaker. The monotony of night-watchman service, followed by a year as a drummer for an Eastern firearm firm, and another year as an inspector for a Pennsylvania powder factory, had infected him with the *wanderlust* of his kind. It was in Chicago, on a raw day of late November, with a lake wind whipping the street dust into his eyes, that he had seen the huge canvas sign of a hiring agency's office, slapping in the storm. This sign had said:

"MEN WANTED."

Being twenty-six and adventurous and out of a job, he had drifted in with the rest of earth's undesirables and asked for work.

After twenty minutes of private coaching in the mysteries of railway signals, he had been "passed" by the desk examiner and sent out as one of the "scab" train crew to move perishable freight, for the Wisconsin Central was then in the throes of its first great strike. And he had gone out as a green brakeman, but he had come back as a hero, with a *Tribune* reporter posing him against a furniture car for a two-column photo. For the strikers had stoned his train, half killed the "scab" fireman, stalled him in the yards and cut off two thirds of his cars and shot out the cab-windows for full measure. But in the cab with an Irish engine-driver named O'Hagan, Blake had backed down through the yards again, picked up his train, crept up over the tender and along the car tops, recoupled his cars, fought his way back to the engine, and there, with the ecstatic O'Hagan at his side, had hurled back the last of the strikers trying to storm his engine steps.

He even fell to "firing" as the yodeling O'Hagan got his train moving again, and then, perched on the tender coal, took pot-shots with his brand-new revolver at a last pair of strikers who were attempting to manipulate the hand-brakes.

That had been the first train to get out of the yards in seven days. Through a godlike disregard of signals, it is true, they had run into an open switch, some twenty-eight miles up the line, but they had moved their freight and won their point.

Blake, two weeks later, had made himself further valuable to that hiring agency, not above subornation of perjury, by testifying in a court of law to the sobriety of a passenger crew who had been carried drunk from their scab-manned train. So naïvely dogged was he in his stand, so quick was he in his retorts, that the agency, when the strike ended by a compromise ten days later, took him on as one of their own operatives.

Thus James Blake became a private detective. He was at first disappointed in the

work. It seemed, at first, little better than his old job as watchman and checker. But the agency, after giving him a three-week try out at picket work, submitted him to the further test of a "shadowing" case. That first assignment of "tailing" kept him thirty-six hours without sleep, but he stuck to his trail, stuck to it with the blind pertinacity of a bloodhound, and at the end transcended mere animalism by buying a tip from a friendly bartender. Then, when the moment was ripe, he walked into the designated hop-joint and picked his man out of an underground bunk as impassively as a grocer takes an egg crate from a cellar shelf.

After his initial baptism of fire in the Wisconsin Central railway yards, however, Blake yearned for something more exciting, for something more sensational. His hopes rose, when, a month later, he was put on "track" work. He was at heart fond of both a good horse and a good heat. He liked the open air and the stir and movement and color of the grand-stand crowds. He liked the "ponies"

with the sunlight on their satin flanks, the music of the band, the gaily appareled women. He liked, too, the off-hand deference of the men about him, from turnstile to betting shed, once his calling was known. They were all ready to curry favor with him, touts and rail-birds, clockers and owners, jockeys and gamblers and bookmakers, placating him with an occasional "sure-thing" tip from the stables, plying him with cigars and advice as to how he should place his money. There was a tacit understanding, of course, that in return for these courtesies his vision was not to be too keen nor his manner too aggressive. When he was approached by an expert "dip" with the offer of a fat reward for immunity in working the track crowds, Blake carefully weighed the matter, pro and con, equivocated, and decided he would gain most by a "fall." So he planted a barber's assistant with whom he was friendly, descended on the pickpocket in the very act of going through that bay-rum scented youth's pocket, and secured a conviction that brought a letter of thanks from the

club stewards and a word or two of approval from his head office.

That head office, seeing that they had a man to be reckoned with, transferred Blake to their Eastern division, with headquarters at New York, where new men and new faces were at the moment badly needed.

They worked him hard, in that new division, but he never objected. He was sober; he was dependable; and he was dogged with the doggedness of the unimaginative. He wanted to get on, to make good, to be more than a mere "operative." And if his initial assignments gave him little but "rough-neck" work to do, he did it without audible complaint. He did bodyguard service, he handled strike breakers, he rounded up freight-car thieves, he was given occasionally "spot" and "tailing" work to do. Once, after a week of upholstered hotel lounging on a divorce case he was sent out on night detail to fight river pirates stealing from the coal-road barges.

In the meantime, being eager and unsatisfied, he studied his city. Laboriously and pa-

tiently he made himself acquainted with the ways of the underworld. He saw that all his future depended upon acquaintanceship with criminals, not only with their faces, but with their ways and their women and their weaknesses. So he started a gallery, a gallery of his own, a large and crowded gallery between walls no wider than the bones of his own skull. To this jealously guarded and ponderously sorted gallery he day by day added some new face, some new scene, some new name. Crook by crook he stored them away there, for future reference. He got to know the "habituals" and the "timers," the "gangs" and their "hang outs" and "fences." He acquired an array of confidence men and hotel beats and queer shovers and bank sneaks and wire tappers and drum snuffers. He made a mental record of dips and yeggs and till-tappers and keister-crackers, of panhandlers and dummy chuckers, of sun gazers and schlaum workers. He slowly became acquainted with their routes and their rendezvous, their tricks and ways and records. But, what was more important, he

also grew into an acquaintanceship with ward politics, with the nameless Power above him and its enigmatic traditions. He got to know the Tammany heelers, the men with "pull," the lads who were to be "pounded" and the lads who were to be let alone, the men in touch with the "Senator," and the gangs with the fall money always at hand.

Blake, in those days, was a good "mixer." He was not an "office" man, and was never dubbed high-brow. He was not above his work; no one accused him of being too refined for his calling. Through a mind such as his the Law could best view the criminal, just as a solar eclipse is best viewed through smoked glass.

He could hobnob with bartenders and red-lighters, pass unnoticed through a slum, join casually in a stuss game, or loaf unmarked about a street corner. He was fond of pool and billiards, and many were the unconsidered trifles he picked up with a cue in his hand. His face, even in those early days, was heavy and inoffensive. Commonplace seemed to be

the word that fitted him. He could always mix with and become one of the crowd. He would have laughed at any such foolish phrase as "protective coloration." Yet seldom, he knew, men turned back to look at him a second time. Small-eyed, beefy and well-fed, he could have passed, under his slightly tilted black boulder, as a truck driver with a day off.

What others might have denominated as "dirty work" he accepted with heavy impassivity, consoling himself with the contention that its final end was cleanness. And one of his most valuable assets, outside his stolid heartlessness, was his speaking acquaintanceship with the women of the underworld. He remained aloof from them even while he mixed with them. He never grew into a "moll-buzzer." But in his rough way he cultivated them. He even helped some of them out of their troubles—in consideration for "tips" which were to be delivered when the emergency arose. They accepted his gruffness as simple-mindedness, as blunt honesty. One or two, with their morbid imaginations touched by his

seeming generosities, made wistful amatory advances which he promptly repelled. He could afford to have none of them with anything "on" him. He saw the need of keeping cool headed and clean handed, with an eye always to the main issue.

And Blake really regarded himself as clean handed. Yet deep in his nature was that obliquity, that adeptness at trickery, that facility in deceit, which made him the success he was. He could always meet a crook on his own ground. He had no extraneous sensibilities to eliminate. He mastered a secret process of opening and reading letters without detection. He became an adept at picking a lock. One of his earlier successes had depended on the cool dexterity with which he had exchanged trunk checks in a Wabash baggage car at Black Rock, allowing the "loft" thief under suspicion to carry off a dummy trunk, while he came into possession of another's belongings and enough evidence to secure his victim's conviction.

At another time, when "tailing" on a

badger-game case, he equipped himself as a theatrical "bill-sniper," followed his man about without arousing suspicion, and made liberal use of his magnetized tack-hammer in the final mix up when he made his haul. He did not shirk these mix ups, for he was endowed with the bravery of the unimaginative. This very mental heaviness, holding him down to materialities, kept his contemplation of contingencies from becoming bewildering. He enjoyed the limitations of the men against whom he was pitted. Yet at times he had what he called a "coppered hunch." When, in later years, an occasional criminal of imagination became his enemy, he was often at a loss as to how to proceed. But imaginative criminals, he knew, were rare, and dilemmas such as these proved infrequent. Whatever his shift, or however unsavory his resource, he never regarded himself as on the same basis as his opponents. He had Law on his side; he was the instrument of that great power known as Justice.

As Blake's knowledge of New York and

his work increased he was given less and less of the "rough-neck" work to do. He proved himself, in fact, a stolid and painstaking "investigator." As a divorce-suit shadower he was equally resourceful and equally successful. When his agency took over the bankers' protective work he was advanced to this new department, where he found himself compelled to a new term of study and a new circle of alliances. He went laboriously through records of forgers and check raisers and counterfeiters. He took up the study of all such gentry, sullenly yet methodically, like a backward scholar mastering a newly imposed branch of knowledge, thumbing frowningly through official reports, breathing heavily over portrait files and police records, plodding determinedly through counterfeit-detector manuals. For this book work, as he called it, he retained a deep-seated disgust.

The outcome of his first case, later known as the "Todaro National Ten Case," confirmed him in this attitude. Going doggedly over the counterfeit ten-dollar national bank note that

had been given him after two older operatives had failed in the case, he discovered the word "Dollars" in small lettering spelt "Ddllers." Concluding that only a foreigner would make a mistake of that nature, and knowing the activity of certain bands of Italians in such counterfeiting efforts, he began his slow and scrupulous search through the purlieus of the East Side. About that search was neither movement nor romance. It was humdrum, dogged, disheartening labor, with the gradual elimination of possibilities and the gradual narrowing down of his field. But across that ever-narrowing trail the accidental little clue finally fell, and on the night of the final raid the desired plates were captured and the notorious and long-sought Todaro rounded up.

So successful was Blake during the following two years that the Washington authorities, coming in touch with him through the operations of the Secret Service, were moved to make him an offer. This offer he stolidly considered and at last stolidly accepted. He became an official with the weight of the Federal

authority behind him. He became an investigator with the secrets of the Bureau of Printing and Engraving at his beck. He found himself a cog in a machinery that seemed limitless in its ramifications. He was the agent of a vast and centralized authority, an authority against which there could be no opposition. But he had to school himself to the knowledge that he was a cog, and nothing more. And two things were expected of him, efficiency and silence.

He found a secret pleasure, at first, in the thought of working from under cover, in the sense of operating always in the dark, unknown and unseen. It gave a touch of something Olympian and godlike to his movements. But as time went by the small cloud of discontent on his horizon grew darker, and widened as it blackened. He was avid of something more than power. He thirsted not only for its operation, but also for its display. He rebelled against the idea of a continually submerged personality. He nursed a keen hunger to leave some record of what he did or

had done. He objected to it all as a conspiracy of obliteration, objected to it as an actor would object to playing to an empty theater. There was no one to appreciate and applaud. And an audience was necessary. He enjoyed the unctuous salute of the patrolman on his beat, the deferential door-holding of "office boys," the quick attentiveness of minor operatives. But this was not enough. He felt the normal demand to assert himself, to be known at his true worth by both his fellow workers and the world in general.

It was not until the occasion when he had run down a gang of Williamsburg counterfeiters, however, that his name was conspicuously in print. So interesting were the details of this gang's operations, so typical were their methods, that Wilkie or some official under Wilkie had handed over to a monthly known as *The Counterfeit Detector* a full account of the case. A New York paper has printed a somewhat distorted and romanticized copy of this, having sent a woman reporter to interview Blake—while a staff artist made a

pencil drawing of the Secret Service man during the very moments the latter was smilingly denying them either a statement or a photograph. Blake knew that publicity would impair his effectiveness. Some inner small voice forewarned him that all outside recognition of his calling would take away from his value as an agent of the Secret Service. But his hunger for his rights as a man was stronger than his discretion as an official. He said nothing openly; but he allowed inferences to be drawn and the artist's pencil to put the finishing touches to the sketch.

It was here, too, that his slyness, his natural circuitiveness, operated to save him. When the inevitable protest came he was able to prove that he had said nothing and had indignantly refused a photograph. He completely cleared himself. But the hint of an interesting personality had been betrayed to the public, the name of a new sleuth had gone on record, and the infection of curiosity spread like a mulberry rash from newspaper office to newspaper office. A representative of the press, every

now and then, would drop in on Blake, or chance to occupy the same smoking compartment with him on a run between Washington and New York, to ply his suavest and subtlest arts for the extraction of some final fact with which to cap an unfinished "story." Blake, in turn, became equally subtle and suave. His lips were sealed, but even silence, he found, could be made illuminative. Even reticence, on occasion, could be made to serve his personal ends. He acquired the trick of surrendering data without any shadow of actual statement.

These chickens, however, all came home to roost. Official recognition was taken of Blake's tendencies, and he was assigned to those cases where a "leak" would prove least embarrassing to the Department. He saw this and resented it. But in the meantime he had been keeping his eyes open and storing up in his cabinet of silence every unsavory rumor and fact that might prove of use in the future. He found himself, in due time, the master of an arsenal of political secrets. And when it came to a display of power he could

merit the attention if not the respect of a startlingly wide circle of city officials. When a New York municipal election brought a party turn over, he chose the moment as the psychological one for a display of his power, cruising up and down the coasts of officialdom with his grim facts in tow, for all the world like a flagship followed by its fleet.

It was deemed expedient for the New York authorities to "take care" of him. A berth was made for him in the Central Office, and after a year of laborious manipulation he found himself Third Deputy Commissioner and a power in the land.

If he became a figure of note, and fattened on power, he found it no longer possible to keep as free as he wished from entangling alliances. He had by this time learned to give and take, to choose the lesser of two evils, to pay the ordained price for his triumphs. Occasionally the forces of evil had to be bribed with a promise of protection. For the surrender of dangerous plates, for example, a counterfeiter might receive immunity, or for

the turning of State's evidence a guilty man might have to go scott free. At other times, to squeeze confession out of a crook, a cruelty as refined as that of the Inquisition had to be adopted. In one stubborn case the end had been achieved by depriving the victim of sleep, this Chinese torture being kept up until the needed nervous collapse. At another time the midnight cell of a suspected murderer had been "set" like a stage, with all the accessories of his crime, including even the cadaver, and when suddenly awakened the frenzied man had shrieked out his confession. But, as a rule, it was by imposing on his prisoner's better instincts, such as gang-loyalty or pity for a supposedly threatened "rag," that the point was won. In resources of this nature Blake became quite conscienceless, salving his soul with the altogether jesuitic claim that illegal means were always justified by the legal end.

By the time he had fought his way up to the office of Second Deputy he no longer resented being known as a "rough neck" or a "flat foot." As an official, he believed in rough-

ness; it was his right; and one touch of right made away with all wrong, very much as one grain of pepsin properly disposed might digest a carload of beef. A crook was a crook. His natural end was the cell or the chair, and the sooner he got there the better for all concerned. So Blake believed in "hammering" his victims. He was an advocate of "confrontation." He had faith in the old-fashioned "third-degree" dodges. At these, in his ponderous way, he became an adept, looking on the nervous system of his subject as a nut, to be calmly and relentlessly gnawed at until the meat of truth lay exposed, or to be cracked by the impact of some sudden great shock. Nor was the Second Deputy above resorting to the use of "plants." Sometimes he had to call in a "fixer" to manufacture evidence, that the far-off ends of justice might not be defeated. He made frequent use of women of a certain type, women whom he could intimidate as an officer or buy over as a good fellow. He had his *aides* in all walks of life, in clubs and offices, in pawnshops and saloons, in hotels and

steamers and barber shops, in pool rooms and anarchists' cellars. He also had his visiting list, his "fences" and "stool-pigeons" and "shoo-flies."

He preferred the "outdoor" work, both because he was more at home in it and because it was more spectacular. He relished the bigger cases. He liked to step in where an underling had failed, get his teeth into the situation, shake the mystery out of it, and then obliterate the underling with a half hour of blasphemous abuse. He had scant patience with what he called the "high-collar cops." He consistently opposed the new-fangled methods, such as the *Portrait Parle,* and pin-maps for recording crime, and the graphic-system boards for marking the movements of criminals. All anthropometric nonsense such as Bertillon's he openly sneered at, just as he scoffed at card indexes and finger prints and other academic innovations which were debilitating the force. He had gathered his own data, at great pains, he nursed his own personal knowledge as to habitual offenders and their aliases,

their methods, their convictions and records, their associates and hang outs. He carried his own gallery under his own hat, and he was proud of it. His memory was good, and he claimed always to know his man. His intuitions were strong, and if he disliked a captive, that captive was in some way guilty—and he saw to it that his man did not escape. He was relentless, once his professional pride was involved. Being without imagination, he was without pity. It was, at best, a case of dog eat dog, and the Law, the Law for which he had such reverence, happened to keep him the upper dog.

Yet he was a comparatively stupid man, an amazingly self-satisfied toiler who had chanced to specialize on crime. And even as he became more and more assured of his personal ability, more and more entrenched in his tradition of greatness, he was becoming less and less elastic, less receptive, less adaptive. Much as he tried to blink the fact, he was compelled to depend more and more on the office behind him. His personal gallery, the gallery

under his hat, showed a tendency to become both obsolete and inadequate. That endless catacomb of lost souls grew too intricate for one human mind to compass. New faces, new names, new tricks tended to bewilder him. He had to depend more and more on the clerical staff and the finger-print bureau records. His position became that of a villager with a department store on his hands, of a country shopkeeper trying to operate an urban emporium. He was averse to deputizing his official labors. He was ignorant of system and science. He took on the pathos of a man who is out of his time, touched with the added poignancy of a passionate incredulity as to his predicament. He felt, at times, that there was something wrong, that the rest of the Department did not look on life and work as he did. But he could not decide just where the trouble lay. And in his uncertainty he made it a point to entrench himself by means of "politics." It became an open secret that he had a pull, that his position was impregnable. This in turn tended to coarsen his methods. It lifted him

beyond the domain of competitive effort. It touched his carelessness with arrogance. It also tinged his arrogance with occasional cruelty.

He redoubled his efforts to sustain the myth which had grown up about him, the myth of his vast cleverness and personal courage. He showed a tendency for the more turbulent centers. He went among murderers without a gun. He dropped into dives, protected by nothing more than the tradition of his office. He pushed his way in through thugs, picked out his man, and told him to come to Headquarters in an hour's time—and the man usually came. His appetite for the spectacular increased. He preferred to head his own gambling raids, ax in hand. But more even than his authority he liked to parade his knowledge. He liked to be able to say: "This is Sheeny Chi's coup!" or, "That 's a job that only Soup-Can Charlie could do!" When a police surgeon hit on the idea of etherizing an obdurate "dummy chucker," to determine if the prisoner could talk or not, Blake appro-

priated the suggestion as his own. And when the "press boys" trooped in for their daily gist of news, he asked them, as usual, not to couple his name with the incident; and they, as usual, made him the hero of the occasion.

For Never-Fail Blake had made it a point to be good to the press boys. He acquired an ability to "jolly" them without too obvious loss of dignity. He took them into his confidences, apparently, and made his disclosures personal matters, individual favors. He kept careful note of their names, their characteristics, their interests. He cultivated them, keeping as careful track of them from city to city as he did of the "big" criminals themselves. They got into the habit of going to him for their special stories. He always exacted secrecy, pretended reluctance, yet parceled out to one reporter and another those dicta to which his name could be most appropriately attached. He even surrendered a clue or two as to how his own activities and triumphs might be worked into a given story. When he perceived that those worldly wise young men of

the press saw through the dodge, he became more adept, more adroit, more delicate in method. But the end was the same.

It was about this time that he invested in his first scrap-book. Into this secret granary went every seed of his printed personal history. Then came the higher records of the magazines, the illustrated articles written about "Blake, the Hamard of America," as one of them expressed it, and "Never-Fail Blake," as another put it. He was very proud of those magazine articles, he even made ponderous and painstaking efforts for their repetition, at considerable loss of dignity. Yet he adopted the pose of disclaiming responsibility, of disliking such things, of being ready to oppose them if some effective method could only be thought out. He even hinted to those about him at Headquarters that this seeming garrulity was serving a good end, claiming it to be harmless pother to "cover" more immediate trails on which he pretended to be engaged.

But the scrap-books grew in number and size. It became a task to keep up with his

clippings. He developed into a personage, as much a personage as a grand-opera prima donna on tour. His successes were talked over in clubs. His name came to be known to the men in the street. His "camera eye" was now and then mentioned by the scientists. His unblemished record was referred to in an occasional editorial. When an ex-police reporter came to him, asking him to father a macaronic volume bearing the title "Criminals of America," Blake not only added his name to the title page, but advanced three hundred dollars to assist towards its launching.

The result of all this was a subtle yet unmistakable shifting of values, an achievement of public glory at the loss of official confidence. He excused his waning popularity among his co-workers on the ground of envy. It was, he held, merely the inevitable penalty for supreme success in any field. But a hint would come, now and then, that troubled him. "You think you 're a big gun, Blake," one of his underworld victims once had the temerity to cry

out at him. "You think you 're the king of the Hawkshaws! But if you were on *my* side of the fence, you 'd last about as long as a snowball on a crownsheet!"

III

IT was not until the advent of Copeland, the new First Deputy, that Blake began to suspect his own position. Copeland was an out-and-out "office" man, anything but a "flat foot." Weak looking and pallid, with the sedentary air of a junior desk clerk, vibratingly restless with no actual promise of being penetrating, he was of that indeterminate type which never seems to acquire a personality of its own. The small and bony and steel-blue face was as neutral as the spare and reticent figure that sat before a bald table in a bald room as inexpressive and reticent as its occupant. Copeland was not only unknown outside the Department; he was, in a way, unknown in his own official circles.

And then Blake woke up to the fact that some one on the inside was working against him, was blocking his moves, was actually using

him as a "blind." While he was given the "cold" trails, younger men went out on the "hot" ones. There were times when the Second Deputy suspected that his enemy was Copeland. Not that he could be sure of this, for Copeland himself gave no inkling of his attitude. He gave no inkling of anything, in fact, personal or impersonal. But more and more Blake was given the talking parts, the rôle of spokesman to the press. He was more and more posted in the background, like artillery, to intimidate with his remote thunder and cover the advance of more agile columns. He was encouraged to tell the public what he knew, but he was not allowed to know too much. And, ironically enough, he bitterly resented this rôle of "mouthpiece" for the Department.

"You call yourself a gun!" a patrolman who had been shaken down for insubordination broke out at him. "A gun! why, you 're only a *park* gun! That 's all you are, a broken-down bluff, an ornamental has-been, a park gun for kids to play 'round!"

Blake raged at that, impotently, pathetically, like an old lion with its teeth drawn. He prowled moodily around, looking for an enemy on whom to vent his anger. But he could find no tangible force that opposed him. He could see nothing on which to centralize his activity. Yet something or somebody was working against him. To fight that opposition was like fighting a fog. It was as bad as trying to shoulder back a shadow.

He had his own "spots" and "finders" on the force. When he had been tipped off that the powers above were about to send him out on the Binhart case, he passed the word along to his underlings, without loss of time, for he felt that he was about to be put on trial, that they were making the Binhart capture a test case. And he had rejoiced mightily when his dragnet had brought up the unexpected tip that Elsie Verriner had been in recent communication with Binhart, and with pressure from the right quarter could be made to talk.

This tip had been a secret one. Blake, on his part, kept it well muffled, for he intended

that his capture of Binhart should be not only a personal triumph for the Second Deputy, but a vindication of that Second Deputy's methods.

So when the Commissioner called him and Copeland into conference, the day after his talk with Elsie Verriner, Blake prided himself on being secretly prepared for any advances that might be made.

It was the Commissioner who did the talking. Copeland, as usual, lapsed into the background, cracking his dry knuckles and blinking his pale-blue eyes about the room as the voices of the two larger men boomed back and forth.

"We 've been going over this Binhart case," began the Commissioner. "It 's seven months now—and nothing done!"

Blake looked sideways at Copeland. There was muffled and meditative belligerency in the look. There was also gratification, for it was the move he had been expecting.

"I always said McCooey was n't the man to go out on that case," said the Second Deputy, still watching Copeland.

"Then who *is* the man?" asked the Commissioner.

Blake took out a cigar, bit the end off, and struck a match. It was out of place; but it was a sign of his independence. He had long since given up plug and fine-cut and taken to fat Havanas, which he smoked audibly, in plethoric wheezes. Good living had left his body stout and his breathing slightly asthmatic. He sat looking down at his massive knees; his oblique study of Copeland, apparently, had yielded him scant satisfaction. Copeland, in fact, was making paper fans out of the official note-paper in front of him.

"What 's the matter with Washington and Wilkie?" inquired Blake, attentively regarding his cigar.

"They 're just where we are—at a standstill," acknowledged the Commissioner.

"And that 's where we 'll stay!" heavily contended the Second Deputy.

The entire situation was an insidiously flattering one to Blake. Every one else had

failed. They were compelled to come to him, their final resource.

"Why?" demanded his superior.

"Because we have n't got a man who can turn the trick! We have n't got a man who can go out and round up Binhart inside o' seven years!"

"Then what is your suggestion?" It was Copeland who spoke, mild and hesitating.

"D' you want my suggestion?" demanded Blake, warm with the wine-like knowledge which, he knew, made him master of the situation.

"Of course," was the Commissioner's curt response.

"Well, you 've got to have a man who knows Binhart, who knows him and his tricks and his hang outs!"

"Well, who does?"

"I do," declared Blake.

The Commissioner indulged in his wintry smile.

"You mean if you were n't tied down to your

Second Deputy's chair you could go out and get him!"

"I could!"

"Within a reasonable length of time?"

"I don't know about the time! But I could get him, all right."

"If you were still on the outside work?" interposed Copeland.

"I certainly would n't expect to dig him out o' my stamp drawer," was Blake's heavily facetious retort.

Copeland and the Commissioner looked at each other, for one fraction of a second.

"You know what my feeling is," resumed the latter, "on this Binhart case."

"I know what *my* feeling is," declared Blake.

"What?"

"That the right method would 've got him six months ago, without all this monkey work!"

"Then why not end the monkey work, as you call it?"

"How?"

"By doing what you say you can do!" was the Commissioner's retort.

"How 'm I going to hold down a chair and hunt a crook at the same time?"

"Then why hold down the chair? Let the chair take care of itself. It could be arranged, you know."

Blake had the stage-juggler's satisfaction of seeing things fall into his hands exactly as he had manœuvered they should. His reluctance was merely a dissimulation, a stage wait for heightened dramatic effect.

"How 'd you do the arranging?" he calmly inquired.

"I could see the Mayor in the morning. There will be no Departmental difficulty."

"Then where 's the trouble?"

"There is none, if you are willing to go out."

"Well, we can't get Binhart here by pink-tea invitations. Somebody 's got to go out and *get* him!"

"The bank raised the reward to eight thou-

sand this week," interposed the ruminative Copeland.

"Well, it 'll take money to get him," snapped back the Second Deputy, remembering that he had a nest of his own to feather.

"It will be worth what it costs," admitted the Commissioner.

"Of course," said Copeland, "they 'll have to honor your drafts—in reason."

"There will be no difficulty on the expense side," quietly interposed the Commissioner. "The city wants Binhart. The whole country wants Binhart. And they will be willing to pay for it."

Blake rose heavily to his feet. His massive bulk was momentarily stirred by the prospect of the task before him. For one brief moment the anticipation of that clamor of approval which would soon be his stirred his lethargic pulse. Then his cynic calmness again came back to him.

"Then what 're we beefing about?" he demanded. "You want Binhart and I 'll get him for you."

The Commissioner, tapping the top of his desk with his gold-banded fountain pen, smiled. It was almost a smile of indulgence.

"You *know* you will get him?" he inquired.

The inquiry seemed to anger Blake. He was still dimly conscious of the operation of forces which he could not fathom. There were things, vague and insubstantial, which he could not understand. But he nursed to his heavy-breathing bosom the consciousness that he himself was not without his own undivulged powers, his own private tricks, his own inner reserves.

"I say I 'll get him!" he calmly proclaimed. "And I guess that ought to be enough!"

IV

THE unpretentious, brownstone-fronted home of Deputy Copeland was visited, late that night, by a woman. She was dressed in black, and heavily veiled. She walked with the stoop of a sorrowful and middle-aged widow.

She came in a taxicab, which she dismissed at the corner. From the house steps she looked first eastward and then westward, as though to make sure she was not being followed. Then she rang the bell.

She gave no name; yet she was at once admitted. Her visit, in fact, seemed to be expected, for without hesitation she was ushered upstairs and into the library of the First Deputy.

He was waiting for her in a room more intimate, more personal, more companionably

crowded than his office, for the simple reason that it was not a room of his own fashioning. He stood in the midst of its warm hangings, in fact, as cold and neutral as the marble Diana behind him. He did not even show, as he closed the door and motioned his visitor into a chair, that he had been waiting for her.

The woman, still standing, looked carefully about the room, from side to side, saw that they were alone, made note of the two closed doors, and then with a sigh lifted her black gloved hands and began to remove the widow's cap from her head. She sighed again as she tossed the black crepe on the dark-wooded table beside her. As she sank into the chair the light from the electrolier fell on her shoulders and on the carefully coiled and banded hair, so laboriously built up into a crown that glinted nut-brown above the pale face she turned to the man watching her.

"Well?" she said. And from under her level brows she stared at Copeland, serene in her consciousness of power. It was plain that she neither liked him nor disliked him. It was

equally plain that he, too, had his ends remote from her and her being.

"You saw Blake again?" he half asked, half challenged.

"No," she answered.

"Why?"

"I was afraid to."

"Did n't I tell you we 'd take care of your end?"

"I 've had promises like that before. They were n't always remembered."

"But our office never made you that promise before, Miss Verriner."

The woman let her eyes rest on his impassive face.

"That 's true, I admit. But I must also admit I know Jim Blake. We 'd better not come together again, Blake and me, after this week."

She was pulling off her gloves as she spoke. She suddenly threw them down on the table. "There 's just one thing I want to know, and know for certain. I want to know if this is a plant to shoot Blake up?"

The First Deputy smiled. It was not altogether at the mere calmness with which she could suggest such an atrocity.

"Hardly," he said.

"Then what is it?" she demanded.

He was both patient and painstaking with her. His tone was almost paternal in its placativeness.

"It 's merely a phase of departmental business," he answered her. "And we 're anxious to see Blake round up Connie Binhart."

"That 's not true," she answered with neither heat nor resentment, "or you would never have started him off on this blind lead. You 'd never have had me go to him with that King Edward note and had it work out to fit a street in Montreal. You 've got a wooden decoy up there in Canada, and when Blake gets there he 'll be told his man slipped away the day before. Then another decoy will bob up, and Blake will go after that. And when you 've fooled him two or three times he 'll sail back to New York and break me for giving him a false tip."

"Did you give it to him?"

"No, he hammered it out of me. But you knew he was going to do that. That was part of the plant."

She sat studying her thin white hands for several seconds. Then she looked up at the calm-eyed Copeland.

"How are you going to protect me, if Blake comes back? How are you going to keep your promise?"

The First Deputy sat back in his chair and crossed his thin legs.

"Blake will not come back," he announced. She slewed suddenly round on him again.

"Then it *is* a plant!" she proclaimed.

"You misunderstand me, Miss Verriner. Blake will not come back as an official. There will be changes in the Department, I imagine; changes for the better which even he and his Tammany Hall friends can't stop, by the time he gets back with Binhart."

The woman gave a little hand gesture of impatience.

"But don't you see," she protested, "supposing he gives up Binhart? Supposing he suspects something and hurries back to hold down his place?"

"They call him Never-Fail Blake," commented the unmoved and dry-lipped official. He met her wide stare with his gently satiric smile.

"I see," she finally said, "you 're not going to shoot him up. You 're merely going to wipe him out."

"You are quite wrong there," began the man across the table from her. "Administration changes may happen, and in—"

"In other words, you 're getting Jim Blake out of the way, off on this Binhart trail, while you work him out of the Department."

"No competent officer is ever worked out of this Department," parried the First Deputy.

She sat for a silent and studious moment or two, without looking at Copeland. Then she sighed, with mock plaintiveness. Her wistfulness seemed to leave her doubly dangerous.

"Mr. Copeland, are n't you afraid some one might find it worth while to tip Blake off?" she softly inquired.

"What would you gain?" was his pointed and elliptical interrogation.

She leaned forward in the fulcrum of light, and looked at him soberly.

"What is your idea of me?" she asked.

He looked back at the thick-lashed eyes with their iris rings of deep gray. There was something alert and yet unparticipating in their steady gaze. They held no trace of abashment. They were no longer veiled. There was even something disconcerting in their lucid and level stare.

"I think you are a very intelligent woman," Copeland finally confessed.

"I think I am, too," she retorted. "Although I have n't used that intelligence in the right way. Don't smile! I 'm not going to turn mawkish. I 'm not good. I don't know whether I want to be. But I know one thing: I 've got to keep busy—I 've got to be active. I 've *got* to be!"

"And?" prompted the First Deputy, as she came to a stop.

"We all know, now, exactly where we 're at. We all know what we want, each one of us. We know what Blake wants. We know what you want. And I want something more than I 'm getting, just as you want something more than writing reports and rounding up push-cart peddlers. I want my end, as much as you want yours."

"And?" again prompted the First Deputy.

"I 've got to the end of my ropes; and I want to swing around. It 's no reform bee, mind! It 's not what other women like me think it is. But I can't go on. It does n't lead to anything. It does n't pay. I want to be safe. I 've *got* to be safe!"

He looked up suddenly, as though a new truth had just struck home with him. For the first time, all that evening, his face was ingenuous.

"I know what 's behind me," went on the woman. "There 's no use digging that up. And there 's no use digging up excuses for it.

But there *are* excuses—good excuses, or I 'd never have gone through what I have, because I feel I was n't made for it. I 'm too big a coward to face what it leads to. I can look ahead and see through things. I can understand too easily." She came to a stop, and sat back, with one white hand on either arm of the chair. "And I 'm afraid to go on. I want to begin over. And I want to begin on the right side!"

He sat pondering just how much of this he could believe. But she disregarded his veiled impassivity.

"I want you to take Picture 3,970 out of the Identification Bureau, the picture and the Bertillon measurements. And then I want you to give me the chance I asked for."

"But that does not rest with me, Miss Verriner!"

"It will rest with you. I could n't stool with my own people here. But Wilkie knows my value. He knows what I can do for the service if I 'm on their side. He could let me begin with the Ellis Island spotting. I could

stop that Stockholm white-slave work in two months. And when you see Wilkie to-morrow you can swing me one way or the other!"

Copeland, with his chin on his bony breast, looked up to smile into her intent and staring eyes.

"You are a very clever woman," he said. "And what is more, you know a great deal!"

"I know a great deal!" she slowly repeated, and her steady gaze succeeded in taking the ironic smile out of the corners of his eyes.

"Your knowledge," he said with a deliberation equal to her own, "will prove of great value to you—as an agent with Wilkie."

"That 's as you say!" she quietly amended as she rose to her feet. There was no actual threat in her words, just as there was no actual mockery in his. But each was keenly conscious of the wheels that revolved within wheels, of the intricacies through which each was threading a way to certain remote ends. She picked up her black gloves from the desk top. She stood there, waiting.

"You can count on me," he finally said, as

he rose from his chair. "I 'll attend to the picture. And I 'll say the right thing to Wilkie!"

"Then let 's shake hands on it!" she quietly concluded. And as they shook hands her gray-irised eyes gazed intently and interrogatively into his.

V

WHEN Never-Fail Blake alighted from his sleeper in Montreal he found one of Teal's men awaiting him at Bonaventure Station. There had been a hitch or a leak somewhere, this man reported. Binhart, in some way, had slipped through their fingers.

All they knew was that the man they were tailing had bought a ticket for Winnipeg, that he was not in Montreal, and that, beyond the railway ticket, they had no trace of him.

Blake, at this news, had a moment when he saw red. He felt, during that moment, like a drum-major who had "muffed" his baton on parade. Then recovering himself, he promptly confirmed the Teal operative's report by telephone, accepted its confirmation as authentic, consulted a timetable, and made a dash for Windsor Station. There he caught the Winnipeg express, took possession of a stateroom

and indited carefully worded telegrams to Trimble in Vancouver, that all out-going Pacific steamers should be watched, and to Menzler in Chicago, that the American city might be covered in case of Binhart's doubling southward on him. Still another telegram he sent to New York, requesting the Police Department to send on to him at once a photograph of Binhart.

In Winnipeg, two days later, Blake found himself on a blind trail. When he had talked with a railway detective on whom he could rely, when he had visited certain offices and interviewed certain officials, when he had sought out two or three women acquaintances in the city's sequestered area, he faced the bewildering discovery that he was still without an actual clue of the man he was supposed to be shadowing.

It was then that something deep within his nature, something he could never quite define, whispered its first faint doubt to him. This doubt persisted even when late that night a Teal Agency operative wired him from Cal-

gary, stating that a man answering Binhart's description had just left the Alberta Hotel for Banff. To this latter point Blake promptly wired a fuller description of his man, had an officer posted to inspect every alighting passenger, and early the next morning received a telegram, asking for still more particulars.

He peered down at this message, vaguely depressed in spirit, discarding theory after theory, tossing aside contingency after contingency. And up from this gloomy shower slowly emerged one of his "hunches," one of his vague impressions, coming blindly to the surface very much like an earthworm crawling forth after a fall of rain. There was something wrong. Of that he felt certain. He could not place it or define it. To continue westward would be to depend too much on an uncertainty; it would involve the risk of wandering too far from the center of things. He suddenly decided to double on his tracks and swing down to Chicago. Just why he felt as he did he could not fathom. But the feeling was there. It was an instinctive pro-

pulsion, a "hunch." These hunches were to him, working in the dark as he was compelled to, very much what whiskers are to a cat. They could not be called an infallible guide. But they at least kept him from colliding with impregnabilities.

Acting on this hunch, as he called it, he caught a Great Northern train for Minneapolis, transferred to a Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul express, and without loss of time sped southward. When, thirty hours later, he alighted in the heart of Chicago, he found himself in an environment more to his liking, more adaptable to his ends. He was not disheartened by his failure. He did not believe in luck, in miracles, or even in coincidence. But experience had taught him the bewildering extent of the resources which he might command. So intricate and so wide-reaching were the secret wires of his information that he knew he could wait, like a spider at the center of its web, until the betraying vibration awakened some far-reaching thread of that web. In every corner of the country lurked a non-pro-

fessional ally, a secluded tipster, ready to report to Blake when the call for a report came. The world, that great detective had found, was indeed a small one. From its scattered four corners, into which his subterranean wires of espionage stretched, would in time come some inkling, some hint, some discovery. And at the converging center of those wires Blake was able to sit and wait, like the central operator at a telephone switchboard, knowing that the tentacles of attention were creeping and wavering about dim territories and that in time they would render up their awaited word.

In the meantime, Blake himself was by no means idle. It would not be from official circles, he knew, that his redemption would come. Time had already proved that. For months past every police chief in the country had held his description of Binhart. That was a fact which Binhart himself very well knew; and knowing that, he would continue to move as he had been moving, with the utmost secrecy, or at least protected by some adequate disguise.

It would be from the underworld that the echo would come. And next to New York, Blake knew, Chicago would make as good a central exchange for this underworld as could be desired. Knowing that city of the Middle West, and knowing it well, he at once "went down the line," making his rounds stolidly and systematically, first visiting a West Side faro-room and casually interviewing the "stools" of Custom House Place and South Clark Street, and then dropping in at the Café Acropolis, in Halsted Street, and lodging houses in even less savory quarters. He duly canvassed every likely dive, every "melina," every gambling house and yegg hang out. He engaged in leisurely games of pool with stone-getters and gopher men. He visited bucket-shops and bar-rooms, and dingy little Ghetto cafés. He "buzzed" tipsters and floaters and mouthpieces. He fraternized with till tappers and single-drillers. He always made his inquiries after Binhart seem accidental, a case apparently subsidiary to two or three others which he kept always to the foreground.

He did not despair over the discovery that no one seemed to know of Binhart or his movements. He merely waited his time, and extended new ramifications into newer territory. His word still carried its weight of official authority. There was still an army of obsequious underlings compelled to respect his wishes. It was merely a matter of time and mathematics. Then the law of averages would ordain its end; the needed card would ultimately be turned up, the right dial-twist would at last complete the right combination.

The first faint glimmer of life, in all those seemingly dead wires, came from a gambler named Mattie Sherwin, who reported that he had met Binhart, two weeks before, in the café of the Brown Palace in Denver. He was traveling under the name of Bannerman, wore his hair in a pomadour, and had grown a beard.

Blake took the first train out of Chicago for Denver. In this latter city an Elks' Convention was supplying blue-bird weather for underground "haymakers," busy with bunco-steering, "rushing" street-cars and "lifting

leathers." Before the stampede at the news of his approach, he picked up Biff Edwards and Lefty Stivers, put on the screws, and learned nothing. He went next to Glory McShane, a Market Street acquaintance indebted for certain old favors, and from her, too, learned nothing of moment. He continued the quest in other quarters, and the results were equally discouraging.

Then began the real detective work about which, Blake knew, newspaper stories were seldom written. This work involved a laborious and monotonous examination of hotel registers, a canvassing of ticket agencies and cab stands and transfer companies. It was anything but story-book sleuthing. It was a dispiriting tread-mill round, but he was still sifting doggedly through the tailings of possibilities when a code-wire came from St. Louis, saying Binhart had been seen the day before at the Planters' Hotel.

Blake was eastbound on his way to St. Louis one hour after the receipt of this wire. And an hour after his arrival in St. Louis he was en-

gaged in an apparently care free and leisurely game of pool with one Loony Ryan, an old-time "box man" who was allowed to roam with a clipped wing in the form of a suspended indictment. Loony, for the liberty thus doled out to him, rewarded his benefactors by an occasional indulgence in the "pigeon-act."

"Draw for lead?" asked Blake, lighting a cigar.

"Sure," said Loony.

Blake pushed his ball to the top cushion, won the draw, and broke.

"Seen anything of Wolf Yonkholm?" he casually inquired, as he turned to chalk his cue. But his eye, with one quick sweep, had made sure of every face in the room.

Loony studied the balls for a second or two. Wolf was a "dip" with an international record.

"Last time I saw Wolf he was out at 'Frisco, workin' the Beaches," was Loony's reply.

Blake ventured an inquiry or two about other worthies of the underworld. The players went

on with their game, placid, self-immured, matter-of-fact.

"Where 's Angel McGlory these days?" asked Blake, as he reached over to place a ball.

"What 's she been doin'?" demanded Loony, with his cue on the rail.

"She 's traveling with a bank sneak named Blanchard or Binhart," explained Blake. "And I want her."

Loony Ryan made his stroke.

"Hep Roony saw Binhart this mornin', beatin' it for N' Orleans. But he was n't travelin' wit' any moll that Hep spoke of."

Blake made his shot, chalked his cue again, and glanced down at his watch. His eyes were on the green baize, but his thoughts were elsewhere.

"I got 'o leave you, Loony," he announced as he put his cue back in the rack. He spoke slowly and calmly. But Loony's quick gaze circled the room, promptly checking over every face between the four walls.

"What 's up?" he demanded. "Who 'd you spot?"

"Nothing, Loony, nothing! But this game o' yours blamed near made me forget an appointment o' mine!"

Twenty minutes after he had left the bewildered Loony Ryan in the pool parlor he was in a New Orleans sleeper, southward bound. He knew that he was getting within striking distance of Binhart, at last. The zest of the chase took possession of him. The trail was no longer a "cold" one. He knew which way Binhart was headed. And he knew he was not more than a day behind his man.

V

THE moment Blake arrived in New Orleans he shut himself in a telephone booth, called up six somewhat startled acquaintances, learned nothing to his advantage, and went quickly but quietly to the St. Charles. There he closeted himself with two dependable "elbows," started his detectives on a round of the hotels, and himself repaired to the Levee district, where he held off-handed and ponderously facetious conversations with certain unsavory characters. Then came a visit to certain equally unsavory wharf-rats and a call or two on South Rampart Street. But still no inkling of Binhart or his intended movements came to the detective's ears.

It was not until the next morning, as he stepped into Antoine's, on St. Louis Street just off the Rue Royal, that anything of importance occurred. The moment he entered

that bare and cloistral restaurant where Monsieur Jules could dish up such startling uncloistral dishes, his eyes fell on Abe Sheiner, a drum snuffer with whom he had had previous and somewhat painful encounters. Sheiner, it was plain to see, was in clover, for he was breakfasting regally, on squares of toast covered with shrimp and picked crab meat creamed, with a bisque of cray-fish and *papa-bottes* in ribbons of bacon, to say nothing of fruit and *bruilleau.*

Blake insisted on joining his old friend Sheiner, much to the latter's secret discomfiture. It was obvious that the drum snuffer, having made a recent haul, would be amenable to persuasion. And, like all yeggs, he was an upholder of the "moccasin telegraph," a wanderer and a carrier of stray tidings as to the movements of others along the undergrooves of the world. So while Blake breakfasted on shrimp and crab meat and French artichokes stuffed with caviar and anchovies, he intimated to the uneasy-minded Sheiner certain knowledge as to a certain recent coup. In the face of this

charge Sheiner indignantly claimed that he had only been playing the ponies and having a run of greenhorn's luck.

"Abe, I 've come down to gather you in," announced the calmly mendacious detective. He continued to sip his bruilleau with fraternal unconcern.

"You got nothing *on* me, Jim," protested the other, losing his taste for the delicacies arrayed about him.

"Well, we got 'o go down to Headquarters and talk that over," calmly persisted Blake.

"What 's the use of pounding me, when I 'm on the square again?" persisted the ex-drum snuffer.

"That 's the line o' talk they all hand out. That 's what Connie Binhart said when we had it out up in St. Louis."

"Did you bump into Binhart in St. Louis?"

"We had a talk, three days ago."

"Then why 'd he blow through this town as though he had a regiment o' bulls and singed cats behind him!"

Blake's heart went down like an elevator with

a broken cable. But he gave no outward sign of this inward commotion.

"Because he wants to get down to Colon before the Hamburg-American boat hits the port," ventured Blake. "His moll 's aboard!"

"But he blew out for 'Frisco this morning," contended the puzzled Sheiner. "Shot through as though he 'd just had a rumble!"

"Oh, he *said* that, but he went south, all right."

"Then he went in an oyster sloop. There 's nothing sailing from this port to-day."

"Well, what 's Binhart got to do with our trouble anyway? What I want—"

"But I saw him start," persisted the other. "He ducked for a day coach and said he was traveling for his health. And he sure looked like a man in a hurry!"

Blake sipped his bruilleau, glanced casually at his watch, and took out a cigar and lighted it. He blinked contentedly across the table at the man he was "buzzing." The trick had been turned. The word had been given. He knew that Binhart was headed westward again. He

also knew that Binhart had awakened to the fact that he was being followed, that his feverish movements were born of a stampeding fear of capture.

Yet Binhart was not a coward. Flight, in fact, was his only resource. It was only the low-brow criminal, Blake knew, who ran for a hole and hid in it until he was dragged out. The more intellectual type of offender preferred the open. And Binhart was of this type. He was suave and artful; he was active bodied and experienced in the ways of the world. What counted still more, he was well heeled with money. Just how much he had planted away after the Newcomb coup no one knew. But no one denied that it was a fortune. It was ten to one that Binhart would now try to get out of the country. He would make his way to some territory without an extradition treaty. He would look for a land where he could live in peace, where his ill-gotten wealth would make exile endurable.

Blake, as he smoked his cigar and turned these thoughts over in his mind, could afford

to smile. There would be no peace and no rest for Connie Binhart; he himself would see to that. And he would "get" his man; whether it was in a week's time or a month's time, he would "get" his man and take him back in triumph to New York. He would show Copeland and the Commissioner and the world in general that there was still a little life in the old dog, that there was still a haul or two he could make.

So engrossing were these thoughts that Blake scarcely heard the drum snuffer across the table from him, protesting the innocence of his ways and the purity of his intentions. Then for the second time that morning Blake completely bewildered him, by suddenly accepting those protestations and agreeing to let everything drop. It was necessary, of course, to warn Sheiner, to exact a promise of better living. But Blake's interest in the man had already departed. He dropped him from his scheme of things, once he had yielded up his data. He tossed him aside like a sucked orange, a smoked cigar, a burnt-out match.

Binhart, in all the movements of all the stellar system, was the one name and the one man that interested him.

Loony Sheiner was still sitting at that table in Antoine's when Blake, having wired his messages to San Pedro and San Francisco, caught the first train out of New Orleans. As he sped across the face of the world, crawling nearer and nearer the Pacific Coast, no thought of the magnitude of that journey oppressed him. His imagination remained untouched. He neither fretted nor fumed at the time this travel was taking. In spite of the electric fans at each end of his Pullman, it is true, he suffered greatly from the heat, especially during the ride across the Arizona Desert. He accepted it without complaint, stolidly thanking his lucky stars that men were n't still traveling across America's deserts by ox-team. He was glad when he reached the Colorado River and wound up into California, leaving the alkali and sage brush and yucca palms of the Mojave well behind him.

He was glad in his placid way when he reached his hotel in San Francisco and washed the grit and grime from his heat-nettled body.

But once that body had been bathed and fed, he started on his rounds of the underworld, seined the entire harbor-front without effect, and then set out his night-lines as cautiously as a fisherman in forbidden waters. He did not overlook the shipping offices and railway stations, neither did he neglect the hotels and ferries. Then he quietly lunched at Martenelli's with the much-honored but most-uncomfortable Wolf Yonkholm, who promptly suspended his "dip" operations at the Beaches out of respect to Blake's sudden call.

Nothing of moment, however, was learned from the startled Wolf, and at Coppa's six hours later, Blake dined with a Chink-smuggler named Goldie Hopper. Goldie, after his fifth glass of wine and an adroit decoying of the talk along the channels which most interested his portly host, casually announced

that an Eastern crook named Blanchard had got away, the day before, on the Pacific mail steamer *Manchuria*. He was clean shaven and traveled as a clergyman. That struck Goldie as the height of humor, a bank sneak having the nerve to deck himself out as a gospel-spieler.

His elucidation of it, however, brought no answering smile from the diffident-eyed Blake, who confessed that he was rounding up a couple of nickel-coiners and would be going East in a day or two.

Instead of going East, however, he hurriedly consulted maps and timetables, found a train that would land him in Portland in twenty-six hours, and started north. He could eventually save time, he found, by hastening on to Seattle and catching a Great Northern steamer from that port. When a hot-box held his train up for over half an hour, Blake stood with his timepiece in his hand, watching the train crew in their efforts to "freeze the hub." They continued to lose time, during the night. At Seattle, when he

reached the Great Northern docks, he found that his steamer had sailed two hours before he stepped from his sleeper.

His one remaining resource was a Canadian Pacific steamer from Victoria. This, he figured out, would get him to Hong Kong even earlier than the steamer which he had already missed. He had a hunch that Hong Kong was the port he wanted. Just why, he could not explain. But he felt sure that Binhart would not drop off at Manila. Once on the run, he would keep out of American quarters. It was a gamble; it was a rough guess. But then all life was that. And Blake had a dogged and inarticulate faith in his "hunches."

Crossing the Sound, he reached Victoria in time to see the *Empress of China* under way, and heading out to sea. Blake hired a tug and overtook her. He reached the steamer's deck by means of a Jacob's ladder that swung along her side plates like a mason's plumbline along a factory wall.

Binhart, he told himself, was by this time in mid-Pacific, untold miles away, heading

for that vast and mysterious East into which a man could so easily disappear. He was approaching gloomy and tangled waterways that threaded between islands which could not even be counted. He was fleeing towards dark rivers which led off through barbaric and mysterious silence, into the heart of darkness. He was drawing nearer and nearer to those regions of mystery where a white man might be swallowed up as easily as a rice grain is lost in a shore lagoon. He would soon be in those teeming alien cities as under-burrowed as a gopher village.

But Blake did not despair. Their whole barbaric East, he told himself, was only a Chinatown slum on a large scale. And he had never yet seen the slum that remained forever impervious to the right dragnet. He did not know how or where the end would be. But he knew there would be an end. He still hugged to his bosom the placid conviction that the world was small, that somewhere along the frontiers of watchfulness the impact would be recorded and the alarm would be given. A

man of Binhart's type, with the money Binhart had, would never divorce himself completely from civilization. He would always crave a white man's world; he would always hunger for what that world stood for and represented. He would always creep back to it. He might hide in his heathen burrow, for a time; but there would be a limit to that exile. A power stronger than his own will would drive him back to his own land, back to civilization. And civilization, to Blake, was merely a rather large and rambling house equipped with a rather efficient burglar-alarm system, so that each time it was entered, early or late, the tell-tale summons would eventually go to the right quarter. And when the summons came Blake would be waiting for it.

VI

IT was by wireless that Blake made what efforts he could to confirm his suspicions that Binhart had not dropped off at any port of call between San Francisco and Hong Kong. In due time the reply came back to "Bishop MacKishnie," on board the westbound *Empress of China* that the Reverend Caleb Simpson had safely landed from the *Manchuria* at Hong Kong, and was about to leave for the mission field in the interior.

The so-called bishop, sitting in the wireless-room of the *Empress of China,* with a lacerated black cigar between his teeth, received this much relayed message with mixed feelings. He proceeded to send out three Secret Service code-despatches to Shanghai, Amoy and Hong Kong, which, being picked up by a German cruiser, were worried over and argued over and

finally referred back to an intelligence bureau for explanation.

But at Yokohama, Blake hurried ashore in a *sampan,* met an agent who seemed to be awaiting him, and caught a train for Kobe. He hurried on, indifferent to the beauties of the country through which he wound, unimpressed by the oddities of the civilization with which he found himself confronted. His mind, intent on one thing, seemed unable to react to the stimuli of side-issues. From Kobe he caught a *Toyo Kisen Kaisha* steamer for Nagasaki and Shanghai. This steamer, he found, lay over at the former port for thirteen hours, so he shifted again to an outbound boat headed for Woosung.

It was not until he was on the tender, making the hour-long run from Woosung up the Whangpoo to Shanghai itself, that he seemed to emerge from his half-cataleptic indifference to his environment. He began to realize that he was at last in the Orient.

As they wound up the river past sharp-nosed and round-hooded sampans, and archaic

Chinese battle-ships and sea-going junks and gunboats flying their unknown foreign flags, Blake at last began to realize that he was in a new world. The very air smelt exotic; the very colors, the tints of the sails, the hues of clothing, the forms of things, land and sky itself—all were different. This depressed him only vaguely. He was too intent on the future, on the task before him, to give his surroundings much thought.

Blake had entirely shaken off this vague uneasiness, in fact, when twenty minutes after landing he found himself in a red-brick hotel known as The Astor, and guardedly shaking hands with an incredulously thin and sallow-faced man of about forty. Although this man spoke with an English accent and exile seemed to have foreigneered him in both appearance and outlook, his knowledge of America was active and intimate. He passed over to the detective two despatches in cipher, handed him a confidential list of Hong Kong addresses, gave him certain information as to Macao, and an hour later conducted him down

the river to the steamer which started that night for Hong Kong.

As Blake trod that steamer's deck and plowed on through strange seas, surrounded by strange faces, intent on his strange chase, no sense of vast adventure entered his soul. No appreciation of a great hazard bewildered his emotions. The kingdom of romance dwells in the heart, in the heart roomy enough to house it. And Blake's heart was taken up with more material things. He was preoccupied with his new list of addresses, with his new lines of procedure, with the men he must interview and the dives and clubs and bazars he must visit. He had his day's work to do, and he intended to do it.

The result was that of Hong Kong he carried away no immediate personal impression, beyond a vague jumble, in the background of consciousness, of Buddhist temples and British red-jackets, of stately parks and granite buildings, of mixed nationalities and native theaters, of anchored warships and a floating city of houseboats. For it was the same hour

that he landed in this orderly and strangely English city that the discovery he was drawing close to Binhart again swept clean the slate of his emotions. The response had come from a consulate secretary. One wire in all his sentinel network had proved a live one. Binhart was not in Hong Kong, but he had been seen in Macao; he was known to be still there. And beyond that there was little that Never-Fail Blake cared to know.

His one side-movement in Hong Kong was to purchase an American revolver, for it began to percolate even through his indurated sensibilities that he was at last in a land where his name might not be sufficiently respected and his office sufficiently honored. For the first time in seven long years he packed a gun, he condescended to go heeled. Yet no minutest tingle of excitement spread through his lethargic body as he examined this gun, carefully loaded it, and stowed it away in his wallet-pocket. It meant no more to him than the stowing away of a sandwich against the emergency of a possible lost meal.

VII

BY the time he was on the noon boat that left for Macao, Blake had quite forgotten about the revolver. As he steamed southward over smooth seas, threading a way through boulder-strewn islands and skirting mountainous cliffs, his movements seemed to take on a sense of finality. He stood at the rail, watching the hazy blue islands, the forests of fishing-boats and high-pooped junks floating lazily at anchor, the indolent figures which he could catch glimpses of on deck, the green waters of the China Sea. He watched them with intent, yet abstracted, eyes. Some echo of the witchery of those Eastern waters at times penetrated his own preoccupied soul. A vague sense of his remoteness from his old life at last crept in to him.

He thought of the watching green lights

that were flaring up, dusk by dusk, in the shrill New York night, the lamps of the precinct stations, the lamps of Headquarters, where the great building was full of moving feet and shifting faces, where telephones were ringing and detectives were coming and going, and policemen in uniform were passing up and down the great stone steps, clean-cut, ruddy-faced, strong-limbed policemen, talking and laughing as they started out on their night details. He could follow them as they went, those confident-striding "flatties" with their ash night-sticks at their side, soldiers without bugles or banner, going out to do the goodly tasks of the Law, soldiers of whom he was once the leader, the pride, the man to whom they pointed as the Vidoc of America.

And he would go back to them as great as ever. He would again compel their admiration. The newspaper boys would again come filing into his office and shake hands with him and smoke his cigars and ask how much he could tell them about his last haul. And he would recount to them how he shadowed Bin-

hart half way round the world, and gathered him in, and brought him back to Justice.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when Blake's steamer drew near Macao. Against a background of dim blue hills he could make out the green and blue and white of the houses in the Portuguese quarters, guarded on one side by a lighthouse and on the other by a stolid square fort. Swinging around a sharp point, the boat entered the inner harbor, crowded with Chinese craft and coasters and dingy tramps of the sea.

Blake seemed in no hurry to disembark. The sampan into which he stepped, in fact, did not creep up to the shore until evening. There, ignoring the rickshaw coolies who awaited him as he passed an obnoxiously officious trio of customs officers, he disappeared up one of the narrow and slippery side streets of the Chinese quarter.

He followed this street for some distance, assailed by the smell of its mud and rotting sewerage, twisting and turning deeper into the darkness, past dogs and chattering coolies and

oil lamps and gaming-house doors. Into one of these gaming houses he turned, passing through the blackwood sliding door and climbing the narrow stairway to the floor above. There, from a small quadrangular gallery, he could look down on the "well" of the fan-tan lay out below.

He made his way to a seat at the rail, took out a cigar, lighted it, and let his veiled gaze wander about the place, point by point, until he had inspected and weighed and appraised every man in the building. He continued to smoke, listlessly, like a sightseer with time on his hands and in no mood for movement. The brim of his black boulder shadowed his eyes. His thumbs rested carelessly in the arm-holes of his waistcoat. He lounged back torpidly, listening to the drone and clatter of voices below, lazily inspecting each newcomer, pretending to drop off into a doze of ennui. But all the while he was most acutely awake.

For somewhere in that gathering, he knew, there was a messenger awaiting him. Whether he was English or Portuguese, white

or yellow, Blake could not say. But from some one there some word or signal was to come.

He peered down at the few white men in the pit below. He watched the man at the head of the carved blackwood table, beside his heap of brass "cash," watched him again and again as he took up his handful of coins, covered them with a brass hat while the betting began, removed the hat, and seemed to be dividing the pile, with the wand in his hand, into fours. The last number of the last four, apparently, was the object of the wagers.

Blake could not understand the game. It puzzled him, just as the yellow men so stoically playing it puzzled him, just as the entire country puzzled him. Yet, obtuse as he was, he felt the gulf of centuries that divided the two races. These yellow men about him seemed as far away from his humanity, as detached from his manner of life and thought, as were the animals he sometimes stared at through the bars of the Bronx Zoo cages.

A white man would have to be pretty far gone, Blake decided, to fall into their ways,

to be satisfied with the life of those yellow men. He would have to be a terrible failure, or he would have to be hounded by a terrible fear, to live out his life so far away from his own kind. And he felt now that Binhart could never do it, that a life sentence there would be worse than a life sentence to "stir." So he took another cigar, lighted it, and sat back watching the faces about him.

For no apparent reason, and at no decipherable sign, one of the yellow faces across the smoke-filled room detached itself from its fellows. This face showed no curiosity, no haste. Blake watched it as it calmly approached him. He watched until he felt a finger against his arm.

"You clum b'long me," was the enigmatic message uttered in the detective's ear.

"Why should I go along with you?" Blake calmly inquired.

"You clum b'long me," reiterated the Chinaman. The finger again touched the detective's arm. "Clismas!"

Blake rose, at once. He recognized the

code word of "Christmas." This was the messenger he had been awaiting.

He followed the figure down the narrow stairway, through the sliding door, out into the many-odored street, foul with refuse, bisected by its open sewer of filth, took a turning into a still narrower street, climbed a precipitous hill cobbled with stone, turned still again, always overshadowed and hemmed in by tall houses close together, with black-beamed lattice doors through which he could catch glimpses of gloomy interiors. He turned again down a wooden-walled hallway that reminded him of a Mott Street burrow. When the Chinaman touched him on the sleeve he came to a stop.

His guide was pointing to a closed door in front of them.

"You sabby?" he demanded.

Blake hesitated. He had no idea of what was behind that door, but he gathered from the Chinaman's motion that he was to enter. Before he could turn to make further inquiry the Chinaman had slipped away like a shadow.

VIII

BLAKE stood regarding the door. Then he lifted his revolver from his breast pocket and dropped it into his side pocket, with his hand on the butt. Then with his left hand he quietly opened the door, pushed it back, and as quietly stepped into the room.

On the floor, in the center of a square of orange-colored matting, he saw a white woman sitting. She was drinking tea out of an egg-shell of a cup, and after putting down the cup she would carefully massage her lips with the point of her little finger. This movement puzzled the newcomer until he suddenly realized that it was merely to redistribute the rouge on them.

She was dressed in a silk petticoat of almost lemon yellow and an azure-colored silk bodice that left her arms and shoulders bare to the light that played on them from three small

oil lamps above her. Her feet and ankles were also bare, except for the matting sandals into which her toes were thrust. On one thin arm glimmered an extraordinarily heavy bracelet of gold. Her skin, which was very white, was further albificated by a coat of rice powder. She was startlingly slight. Blake, as he watched her, could see the oval shadows under her collar bones and the almost girlish meagerness of breast half-covered by the azure silk bodice.

She looked up slowly as Blake stepped into the room. Her eyes widened, and she continued to look, with parted lips, as she contemplated the intruder's heavy figure. There was no touch of fear on her face. It was more curiosity, the wilful, wide-eyed curiosity of the child. She even laughed a little as she stared at the intruder. Her rouged lips were tinted a carmine so bright that they looked like a wound across her white face. That gash of color became almost clown-like as it crescented upward with its wayward mirth. Her eyebrows were heavily

penciled and the lids of the eyes elongated by a widening point of blue paint. Her bare heel, which she caressed from time to time with fingers whereon the nails were stained pink with henna, was small and clean cut, as clean cut, Blake noticed, as the heel of a razor, while the white calf above it was as thin and flat as a boy's.

"Hello, New York," she said with her foolish and inconsequential little laugh. Her voice took on an oddly exotic intonation, as she spoke. Her teeth were small and white; they reminded Blake of rice, while she repeated the "New York," bubblingly, as though she were a child with a newly learned word.

"Hello!" responded the detective, wondering how or where to begin. She made him think of a painted marionette, so maintained were her poses, so unreal was her make up.

"You 're the party who 's on the man hunt," she announced.

"Am I?" equivocated Blake. She had risen to her feet by this time, with monkey-like agility, and showed herself to be much taller

than he had imagined. He noticed a knife scar on her forearm.

"You 're after this man called Binhart," she declared.

"Oh, no, I 'm not," was Blake's sagacious response. "I don't want Binhart!"

"Then what do you want?"

"I want the money he 's got."

The little painted face grew serious; then it became veiled.

"How much money has he?"

"That 's what I want to find out!"

She squatted ruminatively down on the edge of her divan. It was low and wide and covered with orange-colored silk.

"Then you 'll have to find Binhart!" was her next announcement.

"Maybe!" acknowledged Blake.

"I can show you where he is!"

"All right," was the unperturbed response. The blue-painted eyes were studying him.

"It will be worth four thousand pounds, in English gold," she announced.

Blake took a step or two nearer her.

"Is that the message Ottenheim told you to give me?" he demanded. His face was red with anger.

"Then three thousand pounds," she calmly suggested, wriggling her toes into a fallen sandal.

Blake did not deign to speak. His inarticulate grunt was one of disgust.

"Then a thousand, in gold," she coyly intimated. She twisted about to pull the strap of her bodice up over her white shoulder-blades. "Or I will kill him for you for two thousand pounds in gold!"

Her eyes were as tranquil as a child's. Blake remembered that he was in a world not his own.

"Why should I want him killed?" he inquired. He looked about for some place to sit. There was not a chair in the room.

"Because he intends to kill *you,*" answered the woman, squatting on the orange-covered divan.

"I wish he 'd come and try," Blake devoutly retorted.

"He will not come," she told him. "It will be done from the dark. *I* could have done it. But Ottenheim said no."

"And Ottenheim said you were to work with me in this," declared Blake, putting two and two together.

The woman shrugged a white shoulder.

"Have you any money?" she asked. She put the question with the artlessness of a child.

"Mighty little," retorted Blake, still studying the woman from where he stood. He was wondering if Ottenheim had the same hold on her that the authorities had on Ottenheim, the ex-forger who enjoyed his parole only on condition that he remain a stool-pigeon of the high seas. He pondered what force he could bring to bear on her, what power could squeeze from those carmine and childish lips the information he must have.

He knew that he could break that slim body of hers across his knee. But he also knew that he had no way of crushing out of it the truth he sought, the truth he must in some way obtain. The woman still squatted on the

divan, peering down at the knife scar on her arm from time to time, studying it, as though it were an inscription.

Blake was still watching the woman when the door behind him was slowly opened; a head was thrust in, and as quietly withdrawn again. Blake dropped his right hand to his coat pocket and moved further along the wall, facing the woman. There was nothing of which he stood afraid: he merely wished to be on the safe side.

"Well, what word 'll I take back to Ottenheim?" he demanded.

The woman grew serious. Then she showed her rice-like row of teeth as she laughed.

"That means there 's nothing in it for me," she complained with pouting-lipped moroseness. Her venality, he began to see, was merely the instinctive acquisitiveness of the savage, the greed of the petted child.

"No more than there is for me," Blake acknowledged. She turned and caught up a heavily flowered mandarin coat of plaited

cream and gold. She was thrusting one arm into it when a figure drifted into the room from the matting-hung doorway on Blake's left. As she saw this figure she suddenly flung off the coat and stooped to the tea tray in the middle of the floor.

Blake saw that the newcomer was a Chinaman. This newcomer, he also saw, ignored him as though he were a door post, confronting the woman and assailing her with a quick volley of words, of incomprehensible words in the native tongue. She answered with the same clutter and clack of unknown syllables, growing more and more excited as the dialogue continued. Her thin face darkened and changed, her white arms gyrated, the fires of anger burned in the baby-like eyes. She seemed expostulating, arguing, denouncing, and each wordy sally was met by an equally wordy sally from the Chinaman. She challenged and rebuked with her passionately pointed finger; she threatened with angry eyes; she stormed after the newcomer as he passed like a shadow out of the room; she met

him with a renewed storm when he returned a moment later.

The Chinaman now stood watching her, impassive and immobile, as though he had taken his stand and intended to stick to it. Blake studied him with calm and patient eyes. That huge-limbed detective in his day had "pounded" too many Christy Street Chinks to be in any way intimidated by a queue and a yellow face. He was not disturbed. He was merely puzzled.

Then the woman turned to the mandarin coat, and caught it up, shook it out, and for one brief moment stood thoughtfully regarding it. Then she suddenly turned about on the Chinaman.

Blake, as he stood watching that renewed angry onslaught, paid little attention to the actual words that she was calling out. But as he stood there he began to realize that she was not speaking in Chinese, but in English.

"Do you hear me, white man? Do you hear me?" she cried out, over and over again. Yet the words seemed foolish, for all the time as

she uttered them, she was facing the placid-eyed Chinaman and gesticulating in his face.

"Don't you see," Blake at last heard her crying, "he does n't know what I 'm saying! He does n't understand a word of English!" And then, and then only, it dawned on Blake that every word the woman was uttering was intended for his own ears. She was warning him, and all the while pretending that her words were the impetuous words of anger.

"Watch this man!" he heard her cry. "Don't let him know you 're listening. But remember what I say, remember it. And God help you if you haven't got a gun."

Blake could see her, as in a dream, assailing the Chinaman with her gestures, advancing on him, threatening him, expostulating with him, but all in pantomime. There was something absurd about it, as absurd as a moving-picture film which carries the wrong text.

"He 'll pretend to take you to the man you want," the woman was panting. "That 's what he will say. But it 's a lie. He 'll take

you out to a sampan, to put you aboard Binhart's boat. But the three of them will cut your throat, cut your throat, and then drop you overboard. He 's to get so much in gold. Get out of here with him. Let him think you 're going. But drop away, somewhere, before you get to the beach. And watch them all the way."

Blake stared at the immobile Chinaman, as though to make sure that the other man had not understood. He was still staring at that impassive yellow face, he was still absorbing the shock of his news, when the outer door opened and a second Chinaman stepped into the room. The newcomer cluttered a quick sentence or two to his countryman, and was still talking when a third figure sidled in.

Those spoken words, whatever they were, seemed to have little effect on any one in the room except the woman. She suddenly sprang about and exploded into an angry shower of denials.

"It 's a lie!" she cried in English, storming about the impassive trio. "You never heard

me peach! You never heard me say a word! It 's a lie!"

Blake strode to the middle of the room, towering above the other figures, dwarfing them by his great bulk, as assured of his mastery as he would have been in a Chatham Square gang fight.

"What 's the row here?" he thundered, knowing from the past that power promptly won its own respect. "What 're you talking about, you two?" He turned from one intruder to another. "And you? And you? What do you want, anyway?"

The three contending figures, however, ignored him as though he were a tobacconist's dummy. They went on with their exotic cackle, as though he was no longer in their midst. They did not so much as turn an eye in his direction. And still Blake felt reasonably sure of his position.

It was not until the woman squeaked, like a frightened mouse, and ran whimpering into the corner of the room, that he realized what was happening. He was not familiar with

the wrist movement by which the smallest bodied of the three men was producing a knife from his sleeve. The woman, however, had understood from the first.

"White man, look out!" she half sobbed from her corner. "Oh, white man!" she repeated in a shriller note as the Chinaman, bending low, scuttled across the room to the corner where she cowered.

Blake saw the knife by this time. It was thin and long, for all the world like an icicle, a shaft of cutting steel ground incredibly thin, so thin, in fact, that at first sight it looked more like a point for stabbing than a blade for cutting.

The mere glitter of that knife electrified the staring white man into sudden action. He swung about and tried to catch at the arm that held the steel icicle. He was too late for that, but his fingers closed on the braided queue. By means of this queue he brought the Chinaman up short, swinging him sharply about so that he collided flat faced with the room wall.

Then, for the first time, Blake grew into a comprehension of what surrounded him. He wheeled about, stooped and caught up the papier-mâché tea-tray from the floor and once more stood with his back to the wall. He stood there, on guard, for a second figure with a second steel icicle was sidling up to him. He swung viciously out and brought the tea-tray down on the hand that held this knife, crippling the fingers and sending the steel spinning across the room. Then with his free hand he tugged the revolver from his coat pocket, holding it by the barrel and bringing the metal butt down on the queue-wound head of the third man, who had no knife, but was struggling with the woman for the metal icicle she had caught up from the floor.

Then the five seemed to close in together, and the fight became general. It became a mêlée. With his swinging right arm Blake battered and pounded with his revolver butt. With his left hand he made cutting strokes with the heavy papier-mâché tea-tray, keeping their steel, by those fierce sweeps, away

from his body. One Chinaman he sent sprawling, leaving him huddled and motionless against the orange-covered divan. The second, stunned by a blow of the tea-tray across the eyes, could offer no resistance when Blake's smashing right dealt its blow, the metal gun butt falling like a trip hammer on the shaved and polished skull.

As the white man swung about he saw the third Chinaman with his hand on the woman's throat, holding her flat against the wall, placing her there as a butcher might place a fowl on his block ready for the blow of his carver. Blake stared at the movement, panting for breath, overcome by that momentary indifference wherein a winded athlete permits without protest an adversary to gain his momentary advantage. Then will triumphed over the weakness of the body. But before Blake could get to the woman's side he saw the Chinaman's loose-sleeved right hand slowly and deliberately ascend. As it reached the meridian of its circular upsweep he could see the woman rise on her toes, rise as though with some quick

effort, yet some effort which Blake could not understand.

At the same moment that she did so a look of pained expostulation crept into the staring slant eyes on a level with her own. The yellow jaw gaped, filled with blood, and the poised knife fell at his side, sticking point down in the flooring. The azure and lemon-yellow that covered the woman's body flamed into sudden scarlet. It was only as the figure with the expostulating yellow face sank to the ground, crumpling up on itself as it fell, that Blake comprehended. That quick sweep of scarlet, effacing the azure and lemon, had come from the sudden deluge of blood that burst over the woman's body. She had made use of the upstroke, Mexican style. Her knife had cut the full length of the man's abdominal cavity, clean and straight to the breastbone. He had been ripped up like a herring.

Blake panted and wheezed, not at the sight of the blood, but at the exertion to which his flabby muscles had been put. His body was

moist with sweat. His asthmatic throat seemed stifling his lungs. A faint nausea crept through him, a dim ventral revolt at the thought that such things could take place so easily, and with so little warning.

His breast still heaved and panted and he was still fighting for breath when he saw the woman stoop and wipe the knife on one of the fallen Chinaman's sleeves.

"We 've got to get out of here!" she whimpered, as she caught up the mandarin coat and flung it over her shoulders, for in the struggle her body had been bared almost to the waist. Blake saw the crimson that dripped on her matting slippers and maculated the cream white of the mandarin coat.

"But where 's Binhart?" he demanded, as he looked stolidly about for his black boulder.

"Never mind Binhart," she cried, touching the eviscerated body at her feet with one slipper toe, "or we 'll get what *he* got!"

"I want that man Binhart!" persisted the detective.

"Not here! Not here!' she cried, folding

the loose folds of the cloak closer about her body.

She ran to the matting curtain, looked out, and called back, "Quick! Come quick!" Then she ran back, slipped the bolt in the outer door and rejoined the waiting detective.

"Oh, white man!" she gasped, as the matting fell between them and the room incarnadined by their struggle. Blake was not sure, but he thought he heard her giggle, hysterically, in the darkness. They were groping their way along a narrow passage. They slipped through a second door, closed and locked it after them, and once more groped on through the darkness.

How many turns they took, Blake could not remember. She stopped and whispered to him to go softly, as they came to a stairway, as steep and dark as a cistern. Blake, at the top, could smell opium smoke, and once or twice he thought he heard voices. The woman stopped him, with outstretched arms, at the stair head, and together they stood and listened.

Blake, with nerves taut, waited for some sign from her to go on again. He thought she was giving it, when he felt a hand caress his side. He felt it move upward, exploringly. At the same time that he heard her little groan of alarm he knew that the hand was not hers.

He could not tell what the darkness held, but his movement was almost instinctive. He swung out with his great arm, countered on the crouching form in front of him, caught at a writhing shoulder, and tightening his grip, sent the body catapulting down the stairway at his side. He could hear a revolver go off as the body went tumbling and rolling down —Blake knew that it was a gun not his own.

"Come on, white man!" the girl in front of him was crying, as she tugged at his coat. And they went on, now at a run, taking a turn to the right, making a second descent, and then another to the left. They came to still another door, which they locked behind them. Then they scrambled up a ladder, and he could hear her quick hands padding about in the dark. A moment later she had thrust up a

hatch. He saw it led to the open air, for the stars were above them.

He felt grateful for that open air, for the coolness, for the sense of deliverance which came with even that comparative freedom.

"Don't stop!" she whispered. And he followed her across the slant of the uneven roof. He was weak for want of breath. The girl had to catch him and hold him for a moment.

"On the next roof you must take off your shoes," she warned him. "You can rest then. But hurry—hurry!"

He gulped down the fresh air as he tore at his shoe laces, thrusting each shoe in a side pocket as he started after her. For by this time she was scrambling across the broken sloping roofs, as quick and agile as a cat, dropping over ledges, climbing up barriers and across coping tiles. Where she was leading him he had no remotest idea. She reminded him of a cream-tinted monkey in the maddest of steeplechases. He was glad when she came to a stop.

The town seemed to lay to their right. Be-

fore them were the scattered lights of the harbor and the mild crescent of the outer bay. They could see the white wheeling finger of some foreign gunboat as its searchlight played back and forth in the darkness.

She sighed with weariness and dropped cross-legged down on the coping tiles against which he leaned, regaining his breath. She squatted there, cooingly, like a child exhausted with its evening games.

"I 'm dished!" she murmured, as she sat there breathing audibly through the darkness. "I 'm dished for this coast!"

He sat down beside her, staring at the searchlight. There seemed something reassuring, something authoritative and comforting, in the thought of it watching there in the darkness.

The girl touched him on the knee and then shifted her position on the coping tiles, without rising to her feet.

"Come here!" she commanded. And when he was close beside her she pointed with her thin white arm. "That 's Saint Poalo there —you can just make it out, up high, see. And

those lights are the Boundary Gate. And this sweep of lights below here is the *Praya*. Now look where I 'm pointing. That 's the Luiz Camoes lodging-house. You see the second window with the light in it?"

"Yes, I see it."

"Well, Binhart 's inside that window."

"You know it?"

"I know it."

"So he 's there?" said Blake, staring at the vague square of light.

"Yes, he 's there, all right. He 's posing as a buyer for a tea house, and calls himself Bradley. Lee Fu told me; and Lee Fu is always right."

She stood up and pulled the mandarin coat closer about her thin body. The coolness of the night air had already chilled her. Then she squinted carefully about in the darkness.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I 'm going to get Binhart," was Blake's answer.

He could hear her little childlike murmur of laughter.

"You 're brave, white man," she said, with a hand on his arm. She was silent for a moment, before she added: "And I think you 'll get him."

"Of course I 'll get him," retorted Blake, buttoning his coat. The fires had been relighted on the cold hearth of his resolution. It came to him only as an accidental afterthought that he had met an unknown woman and had passed through strange adventures with her and was now about to pass out of her life again, forever.

"What 'll you do?" he asked.

Again he heard the careless little laugh.

"Oh, I 'll slip down through the Quarter and cop some clothes somewhere. Then I 'll have a sampan take me out to the German boat. It 'll start for Canton at daylight."

"And then?" asked Blake, watching the window of the Luiz Camoes lodging-house below him.

"Then I 'll work my way up to Port Arthur, I suppose. There 's a navy man there who 'll help me!"

"Have n't you any money?" Blake put the question a little uneasily.

Again he felt the careless coo of laughter.

"Feel!" she said. She caught his huge hand between hers and pressed it against her waist line. She rubbed his fingers along what he accepted as a tightly packed coin-belt. He was relieved to think that he would not have to offer her money. Then he peered over the coping tiles to make sure of his means of descent.

"You had better go first," she said, as she leaned out and looked down at his side. "Crawl down this next roof to the end there. At the corner, see, is the end of the ladder."

He stooped and slipped his feet into his shoes. Then he let himself cautiously down to the adjoining roof, steeper even than the one on which they had stood. She bent low over the tiles, so that her face was very close to his as he found his footing and stood there.

"Good-by, white man," she whispered.

"Good-by!" he whispered back, as he worked

his way cautiously and ponderously along that perilous slope.

She leaned there, watching him as he gained the ladder-end. He did not look back as he lowered himself, rung by rung. All thought of her, in fact, had passed from his preoccupied mind. He was once more intent on his own grim ends. He was debating with himself just how he was to get in through that lodging-house window and what his final move would be for the round up of his enemy. He had made use of too many "molls" in his time to waste useless thought on what they might say or do or desire. When he had got Binhart, he remembered, he would have to look about for something to eat, for he was as hungry as a wolf. And he did not even hear the girl's second soft whisper of "Good-by."

IX

THAT stolid practicality which had made Blake a successful operative asserted itself in the matter of his approach to the Luiz Camoes house, the house which had been pointed out to him as holding Binhart.

He circled promptly about to the front of that house, pressed a gold coin in the hand of the half-caste Portuguese servant who opened the door, and asked to be shown to the room of the English tea merchant.

That servant, had he objected, would have been promptly taken possession of by the detective, and as promptly put in a condition where he could do no harm, for Blake felt that he was too near the end of his trail to be put off by any mere side issue. But the coin and the curt explanation that the merchant must be seen at once admitted Blake to the house.

The servant was leading him down the length

of the half-lit hall when Blake caught him by the sleeve.

"You tell my rickshaw boy to wait! Quick, before he gets away!"

Blake knew that the last door would be the one leading to Binhart's room. The moment he was alone in the hall he tiptoed to this door and pressed an ear against its panel. Then with his left hand, he slowly turned the knob, caressing it with his fingers that it might not click when the latch was released. As he had feared, it was locked.

He stood for a second or two, thinking. Then with the knuckle of one finger he tapped on the door, lightly, almost timidly.

A man's voice from within cried out, "Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" But Blake, who had been examining the woodwork of the door-frame, did not choose to wait a minute. Any such wait, he felt, would involve too much risk. In one minute, he knew, a fugitive could either be off and away, or could at least prepare himself for any one intercepting that flight. So Blake took two quick steps back, and brought

his massive shoulder against the door. It swung back, as though nothing more than a parlor match had held it shut. Blake, as he stepped into the room, dropped his right hand to his coat pocket.

Facing him, at the far side of the room, he saw Binhart.

The fugitive sat in a short-legged reed chair, with a grip-sack open on his knees. His coat and vest were off, and the light from the oil lamp at his side made his linen shirt a blotch of white.

He had thrown his head up, at the sound of the opening door, and he still sat, leaning forward in the low chair in an attitude of startled expectancy. There was no outward and apparent change on his face as his eyes fell on Blake's figure. He showed neither fear nor bewilderment. His career had equipped him with histrionic powers that were exceptional. As a bank-sneak and confidence-man he had long since learned perfect control of his features, perfect composure even under the most discomforting circumstances.

"Hello, Connie!" said the detective facing him. He spoke quietly, and his attitude seemed one of unconcern. Yet a careful observer might have noticed that the pulse of his beefy neck was beating faster than usual. And over that great body, under its clothing, were rippling tremors strangely like those that shake the body of a leashed bulldog at the sight of a street cat.

"Hello, Jim!" answered Binhart, with equal composure. He had aged since Blake had last seen him, aged incredibly. His face was thin now, with plum-colored circles under the faded eyes.

He made a move as though to lift down the valise that rested on his knees. But Blake stopped him with a sharp movement of his right hand.

"That 's all right," he said. "Don't get up!"

Binhart eyed him. During that few seconds of silent tableau each man was appraising, weighing, estimating the strength of the other.

"What do you want, Jim?" asked Binhart, almost querulously.

"I want that gun you 've got up there under your liver pad," was Blake's impassive answer.

"Is that all?" asked Binhart. But he made no move to produce the gun.

"Then I want you," calmly announced Blake.

A look of gentle expostulation crept over Binhart's gaunt face.

"You can't do it, Jim," he announced. "You can't take me away from here."

"But I'm going to," retorted Blake.

"How?"

"I 'm just going to take you."

He crossed the room as he spoke.

"Give me the gun," he commanded.

Binhart still sat in the low reed chair. He made no movement in response to Blake's command.

"What 's the good of getting rough-house," he complained.

"Gi' me the gun," repeated Blake.

"Jim, I hate to see you act this way," but as Binhart spoke he slowly drew the revolver from its flapped pocket. Blake's revolver barrel was touching the white shirt-front as the movement was made. It remained there until he had possession of Binhart's gun. Then he backed away, putting his own revolver back in his pocket.

"Now, get your clothes on," commanded Blake.

"What for?" temporized Binhart.

"You 're coming with me!"

"You can't do it, Jim," persisted the other. "You could n't get me down to the water-front, in this town. They 'd get you before you were two hundred yards away from that door."

"I 'll risk it," announced the detective.

"And I 'd fight you myself, every move. This ain't Manhattan Borough, you know, Jim; you can't kidnap a white man. I 'd have you in irons for abduction the first ship we struck. And at the first port of call I 'd have

the best law sharps money could get. You can't do it, Jim. It ain't law!"

"What t' hell do I care for law," was Blake's retort. "I want you and you 're going to come with me."

"Where am I going?"

"Back to New York."

Binhart laughed. It was a laugh without any mirth in it.

"Jim, you 're foolish. You could n't get me back to New York alive, any more than you could take Victoria Peak to New York!"

"All right, then, I 'll take you along the other way, if I ain't going to take you alive. I 've followed you a good many thousand miles, Connie, and a little loose talk ain't going to make me lie down at this stage of the game."

Binhart sat studying the other man for a moment or two.

"Then how about a little real talk, the kind of talk that money makes?"

"Nothing doing!" declared Blake, folding his arms.

Binhart flickered a glance at him as he thrust his own right hand down into the hand-bag on his knees.

"I want to show you what you could get out of this," he said, leaning forward a little as he looked up at Blake.

When his exploring right hand was lifted again above the top of the bag Blake firmly expected to see papers of some sort between its fingers. He was astonished to see something metallic, something which glittered bright in the light from the wall lamp. The record of this discovery had scarcely been carried back to his brain, when the silence of the room seemed to explode into a white sting, a puff of noise that felt like a whip lash curling about Blake's leg. It seemed to roll off in a shifting and drifting cloud of smoke.

It so amazed Blake that he fell back against the wall, trying to comprehend it, to decipher the source and meaning of it all. He was still huddled back against the wall when a second surprise came to him. It was the discovery that Binhart had caught up a hat and a coat,

and was running away, running out through the door while his captor stared after him.

It was only then Blake realized that his huddled position was not a thing of his own volition. Some impact had thrown him against the wall like a toppled nine-pin. The truth came to him, in a sudden flash; Binhart had shot at him. There had been a second revolver hidden away in the hand bag, and Binhart had attempted to make use of it.

A great rage against Binhart swept through him. A still greater rage at the thought that his enemy was running away brought Blake lurching and scrambling to his feet. He was a little startled to find that it hurt him to run. But it hurt him more to think of losing Binhart.

He dove for the door, hurling his great bulk through it, tossing aside the startled Portuguese servant who stood at the outer entrance. He ran frenziedly out into the night, knowing by the staring faces of the street-corner group that Binhart had made the first turning and was running towards the water-front. He

could see the fugitive, as he came to the corner; and like an unpenned bull he swung about and made after him. His one thought was to capture his man. His one obsession was to haul down Binhart.

Then, as he ran, a small trouble insinuated itself into his mind. He could not understand the swishing of his right boot, at every hurrying stride. But he did not stop, for he could already smell the odorous coolness of the water-front and he knew he must close in on his man before that forest of floating sampans and native house-boats swallowed him up.

A lightheadedness crept over him as he came panting down to the water's edge. The faces of the coolies about him, as he bargained for a sampan, seemed far away and misty. The voices, as the flat-bottomed little skiff was pushed off in pursuit of the boat which was hurrying Binhart out into the night, seemed remote and thin, as though coming from across foggy water. He was bewildered by a sense of dampness in his right leg. He patted it with his hand, inquisitively, and found it wet.

He stooped down and felt his boot. It was full of blood. It was overrunning with blood. He remembered then. Binhart had shot him, after all.

He could never say whether it was this discovery, or the actual loss of blood, that filled him with a sudden giddiness. He fell forward on his face, on the bottom of the rocking sampan.

He must have been unconscious for some time, for when he awakened he was dimly aware that he was being carried up the landing-ladder of a steamer. He heard English voices about him. A very youthful-looking ship's surgeon came and bent over him, cut away his trouser-leg, and whistled.

"Why, he 's been bleeding like a stuck pig!" he heard a startled voice, very close to him, suddenly exclaim. And a few minutes later, after being moved again, he opened his eyes to find himself in a berth and the boyish-looking surgeon assuring him it was all right.

"Where 's Binhart?" asked Blake.

"That 's all right, old chap, you just rest up a bit," said the placatory youth.

At nine the next morning Blake was taken ashore at Hong Kong.

After eleven days in the English hospital he was on his feet again. He was quite strong by that time. But for several weeks after that his leg was painfully stiff.

X

TWELVE days later Blake began just where he had left off. He sent out his feelers, he canvassed the offices from which some echo might come, he had Macao searched, and all westbound steamers which he could reach by wireless were duly warned. But more than ever, now, he found, he had to depend on his own initiative, his own personal efforts. The more official the quarters to which he looked for coöperation, the less response he seemed to elicit. In some circles, he saw, his story was even doubted. It was listened to with indifference; it was dismissed with shrugs. There were times when he himself was smiled at, pityingly.

He concluded, after much thought on the matter, that Binhart would continue to work his way westward. That the fugitive would strike inland and try to reach Europe by means

of the Trans-Siberian Railway seemed out of the question. On that route he would be too easily traced. The carefully guarded frontiers of Russia, too, would offer obstacles which he dare not meet. He would stick to the ragged and restless sea-fringes, concluded the detective. But before acting on that conclusion he caught a *Toyo Kisen Kaisha* steamer for Shanghai, and went over that city from the Bund and the Maloo to the narrowest street in the native quarter. In all this second search, however, he found nothing to reward his efforts. So he started doggedly southward again, stopping at Saigon and Bangkok and Singapore.

At each of these ports he went through the same rounds, canvassed the same set of officials, and made the same inquiries. Then he would go to the native quarters, to the gambling houses, to the water-front and the rickshaw coolies and half-naked Malay wharf-rats, holding the departmental photograph of Binhart in his hand and inquiring of stranger after stranger: "You know? You savvy

him?" And time after time the curious yellow faces would bend over the picture, the inscrutable slant eyes would study the face, sometimes silently, sometimes with a disheartening jabber of heathen tongues. But not one trace of Binhart could he pick up.

Then he went on to Penang. There he went doggedly through the same manœuvers, canvassing the same rounds and putting the same questions. And it was at Penang that a sharp-eyed young water-front coolie squinted at the well-thumbed photograph, squinted back at Blake, and shook his head in affirmation. A tip of a few English shillings loosened his tongue, but as Blake understood neither Malay nor Chinese he was in the dark until he led his coolie to a Cook's agent, who in turn called in the local officers, who in turn consulted with the booking-agents of the P. & O. Line. It was then Blake discovered that Binhart had booked passage under the name of Blaisdell, twelve days before, for Brindisi.

Blake studied the map, cashed a draft, and waited for the next steamer. While marking

time he purchased copies of "French Self-Taught" and "Italian Self-Taught," hoping to school himself in a speaking knowledge of these two tongues. But the effort was futile. Pore as he might over those small volumes, he could glean nothing from their laboriously pondered pages. His mind was no longer receptive. It seemed indurated, hard-shelled. He had to acknowledge to his own soul that it was beyond him. He was too old a dog to learn new tricks.

The trip to Brindisi seemed an endless one. He seemed to have lost his earlier tendency to be a "mixer." He became more morose, more self-immured. He found himself without the desire to make new friends, and his Celtic ancestry equipped him with a mute and sullen antipathy for his aggressively English fellow travelers. He spent much of his time in the smoking-room, playing solitaire. When they stopped at Madras and Bombay he merely emerged from his shell to make sure if no trace of Binhart were about. He was no more interested in these heathen cities of a heathen

East than in an ash-pile through which he might have to rake for a hidden coin.

By the time he reached Brindisi he had recovered his lost weight, and added to it, by many pounds. He had also returned to his earlier habit of chewing "fine-cut." He gave less thought to his personal appearance, becoming more and more indifferent as to the impression he made on those about him. His face, for all his increase in flesh, lost its ruddiness. It was plain that during the last few months he had aged, that his hound-like eye had grown more haggard, that his always ponderous step had lost the last of its resilience.

Yet one hour after he had landed at Brindisi his listlessness seemed a thing of the past. For there he was able to pick up the trail again, with clear proof that a man answering to Binhart 's description had sailed for Corfu. From Corfu the scent was followed northward to Ragusa, and from Ragusa, on to Trieste, where it was lost again.

Two days of hard work, however, convinced Blake that Binhart had sailed from Fiume to

Naples. He started southward by train, at once, vaguely surprised at the length of Italy, vaguely disconcerted by the unknown tongue and the unknown country which he had to face.

It was not until he arrived at Naples that he seemed to touch solid ground again. That city, he felt, stood much nearer home. In it were many persons not averse to curry favor with a New York official, and many persons indirectly in touch with the home Department. These persons he assiduously sought out, one by one, and in twelve hours' time his net had been woven completely about the city. And, so far as he could learn, Binhart was still somewhere in that city.

Two days later, when least expecting it, he stepped into the wine-room of an obscure little pension hotel on the Via Margellina and saw Binhart before him. Binhart left the room as the other man stepped into it. He left by way of the window, carrying the casement with him. Blake followed, but the lighter and younger man out-ran him and was swallowed up by one of the unknown streets of an un-

known quarter. An hour later Blake had his hired agents raking that quarter from cellar to garret. It was not until the evening of the following day that these agents learned Binhart had made his way to the Marina, bribed a water-front boatman to row him across the bay, and had been put aboard a freighter weighing anchor for Marseilles.

For the second time Blake traversed Italy by train, hurrying self-immured and preoccupied through Rome and Florence and Genoa, and then on along the Riviera to Marseilles.

In that brawling and turbulent French port, after the usual rounds and the usual inquiries down in the midst of the harbor-front forestry of masts, he found a boatman who claimed to have knowledge of Binhart's whereabouts. This piratical-looking boatman promptly took Blake several miles down the coast, parleyed in the *lingua Franca* of the Mediterranean, argued in broken English, and insisted on going further. Blake, scenting imposture, demanded to be put ashore. This the boatman refused to do. It was then and only then that

the detective suspected he was the victim of a "plant," of a carefully planned shanghaing movement, the object of which, apparently, was to gain time for the fugitive.

It was only at the point of a revolver that Blake brought the boat ashore, and there he was promptly arrested and accused of attempted murder. He found it expedient to call in the aid of the American Consul, who, in turn, suggested the retaining of a local advocate. Everything, it is true, was at last made clear and in the end Blake was honorably released.

But Binhart, in the meantime, had caught a Lloyd Brazileiro steamer for Rio de Janeiro, and was once more on the high seas.

Blake, when he learned of this, sat staring about him, like a man facing news which he could not assimilate. He shut himself up in his hotel room, for an hour, communing with his own dark soul. He emerged from that self-communion freshly shaved and smoking a cigar. He found that he could catch a steamer for Barcelona, and from that port take a Cam-

pania Transatlantic boat for Kingston, Jamaica.

From the American consulate he carried away with him a bundle of New York newspapers. When out on the Atlantic he arranged these according to date and went over them diligently, page by page. They seemed like echoes out of another life. He read listlessly on, going over the belated news from his old-time home with the melancholy indifference of the alien, with the poignant impersonality of the exile. He read of fires and crimes and calamities, of investigations and elections. He read of a rumored Police Department shake up, and he could afford to smile at the vitality of that hellbender-like report. Then, as he turned the worn pages, the smile died from his heavy lips, for his own name leaped up like a snake from the text and seemed to strike him in the face. He spelled through the paragraphs carefully, word by word, as though it were in a language with which he was only half familiar. He even went back and read the entire column for a second time. For there

it told of his removal from the Police Department. The Commissioner and Copeland had saved their necks, but Blake was no longer Second Deputy. They spoke of him as being somewhere in the Philippines, on the trail of the bank-robber Binhart. They went on to describe him as a sleuth of the older school, as an advocate of the now obsolete "third-degree" methods, and as a product of the "machine" which had so long and so flagrantly placed politics before efficiency.

Blake put down the papers, lighted a cigar, sat back, and let the truth of what he had read percolate into his actual consciousness. He was startled, at first, that no great outburst of rage swept through him. All he felt, in fact, was a slow and dull resentment, a resentment which he could not articulate. Yet dull as it was, hour by hour and day by idle day it grew more virulent. About him stood nothing against which this resentment could be marshaled. His pride lay as helpless as a whale washed ashore, too massive to turn and face the tides of treachery that had wrecked it. All he

asked for was time. Let them wait, he kept telling himself; let them wait until he got back with Binhart! Then they would all eat crow, every last man of them!

For Blake did not intend to give up the trail. To do so would have been beyond him. His mental fangs were already fixed in Binhart. To withdraw them was not in his power. He could no more surrender his quarry than the python's head, having once closed on the rabbit, could release its meal. With Blake, every instinct sloped inward, just as every python-fang sloped backward. The actual reason for the chase was no longer clear to his own vision. It was something no longer to be reckoned with. The only thing that counted was the fact that he had decided to "get" Binhart, that he was the pursuer and Binhart was the fugitive. It had long since resolved itself into a personal issue between him and his enemy.

XI

THREE hours after he had disembarked from his steamer at Rio, Blake was breakfasting at the Café Britto in the Ovidor. At the same table with him sat a lean-jawed and rat-eyed little gambler by the name of Passos.

Two hours after this breakfast Passos might have been seen on the Avenida Central, in deep talk with a peddler of artificial diamonds. Still later in the day he held converse with a fellow gambler at the Paineiras, halfway up Mount Corcovado; and the same afternoon he was interrogating a certain discredited concession-hunter on the Petropolis boat.

By evening he was able to return to Blake with the information that Binhart had duly landed at Rio, had hidden for three days in the outskirts of the city, and had gone aboard

a German cargo-boat bound for Colon. Two days later Blake himself was aboard a British freighter northward bound for Kingston. Once again he beheld a tropical sun shimmer on hot brass-work and pitch boil up between bone-white deck-boards sluiced and resluiced by a half-naked crew. Once again he had to face an enervating equatorial heat that vitiated both mind and body. But he neither fretted nor complained. Some fixed inner purpose seemed to sustain him through every discomfort. Deep in that soul, merely filmed with its fixed equatorial calm, burned some dormant and crusader-like propulsion. And an existence so centered on one great issue found scant time to worry over the trivialities of the moment.

After a three-day wait at Jamaica Blake caught an Atlas liner for Colon. And at Colon he found himself once more among his own kind. Scattered up and down the Isthmus he found an occasional Northerner to whom he was not unknown, engineers and construction men who could talk of things

that were comprehensible to him, gamblers and adventurers who took him poignantly back to the life he had left so far behind him. Along that crowded and shifting half-way house for the tropic-loving American he found more than one passing friend to whom he talked hungrily and put many wistful questions. Sometimes it was a rock contractor tanned the color of a Mexican saddle. Sometimes it was a new arrival in Stetson and riding-breeches and unstained leather leggings. Sometimes it was a coatless dump-boss blaspheming his toiling army of spick-a-dees.

Sometimes he talked with graders and carmen and track-layers in Chinese saloons along Bottle Alley. Sometimes it was with a bridge-builder or a lottery capper in the bar-room of the Hotel Central, where he would sit without coat or vest, calmly giving an eye to his game of "draw" or stolidly "rolling the bones" as he talked—but always with his ears open for one particular thing, and that

thing had to do with the movements or the whereabouts of Connie Binhart.

One night, as he sat placidly playing his game of "cut-throat" in his shirt-sleeves, he looked up and saw a russet-faced figure as stolid as his own. This figure, he perceived, was discreetly studying him as he sat under the glare of the light. Blake went on with his game. In a quarter of an hour, however, he got up from the table and bought a fresh supply of "green" Havana cigars. Then he sauntered out to where the russet-faced stranger stood watching the street crowds.

"Pip, what 're you doing down in these parts?" he casually inquired. He had recognized the man as Pip Tankred, with whom he had come in contact five long years before. Pip, on that occasion, was engaged in loading an East River banana-boat with an odd ton or two of cartridges designed for Castro's opponents in Venezuela.

"Oh, I 'm freightin' bridge equipment down the West Coast," he solemnly an-

nounced. "And transshippin' a few cases o' phonograph-records as a side-line!"

"Have a smoke?" asked Blake.

"Sure," responded the russet-faced buccaneer. And as they stood smoking together Blake tenderly and cautiously put out the usual feelers, plying the familiar questions and meeting with the too-familiar lack of response. Like all the rest of them, he soon saw, Pip Tankred knew nothing of Binhart or his whereabouts. And with that discovery his interest in Pip Tankred ceased.

So the next day Blake moved inland, working his interrogative way along the Big Ditch to Panama. He even slipped back over the line to San Cristobel and Ancon, found nothing of moment awaiting him there, and drifted back into Panamanian territory. It was not until the end of the week that the first glimmer of hope came to him.

It came in the form of an incredibly thin *gringo* in an incredibly soiled suit of duck. Blake had been sitting on the wide veranda

of the Hotel Angelini, sipping his "swizzle" and studiously watching the Saturday evening crowds that passed back and forth through Panama's bustling railway station. He had watched the long line of rickety cabs backed up against the curb, the two honking auto-busses, the shifting army of pleasure-seekers along the sidewalks, the noisy saloons round which the crowds eddied like bees about a hive, and he was once more appraising the groups closer about him, when through that seething and bustling mass of humanity he saw Dusty McGlade pushing his way, a Dusty McGlade on whom the rum of Jamaica and the *mezcal* of Guatemala and the *anisado* of Ecuador had combined with the *pulque* of Mexico to set their unmistakable seal.

But three minutes later the two men were seated together above their "swizzles" and Blake was exploring Dusty's faded memories as busily as a leather-dip might explore an inebriate's pockets.

"Who 're you looking for, Jim?" suddenly

and peevishly demanded the man in the soiled white duck, as though impatient of the other's indirections.

Blake smoked for a moment or two before answering.

"I 'm looking for a man called Connie Binhart," he finally confessed, as he continued to study that ruinous figure in front of him. It startled him to see what idleness and alcohol and the heat of the tropics could do to a man once as astute as Dusty McGlade.

"Then why did n't you say so?" complained McGlade, as though impatient of obliquities that had been altogether too apparent. He had once been afraid of this man called Blake, he remembered. But time had changed things, as time has the habit of doing. And most of all, time had changed Blake himself, had left the old-time Headquarters man oddly heavy of movement and strangely slow of thought.

"Well, I 'm saying it now!" Blake's guttural voice was reminding him.

"Then why did n't you say it an hour ago?"

contested McGlade, with his alcoholic peevish obstinacy.

"Well, let 's have it now," placated the patient-eyed Blake. He waited, with a show of indifference. He even overlooked Dusty's curt laugh of contempt.

"I can tell you all right, all right—but it won't do you much good!"

"Why not?" And still Blake was bland and patient.

"Because," retorted McGlade, fixing the other man with a lean finger that was both unclean and unsteady, *"you can't get at him!"*

"You tell me where he is," said Blake, striking a match. "I 'll attend to the rest of it!"

McGlade slowly and deliberately drank the last of his swizzle. Then he put down his empty glass and stared pensively and pregnantly into it.

"What 's there in it for me?" he asked.

Blake, studying him across the small table, weighed both the man and the situation.

"Two hundred dollars in American green-

backs," he announced as he drew out his wallet. He could see McGlade moisten his flaccid lips. He could see the faded eyes fasten on the bills as they were counted out. He knew where the money would go, how little good it would do. But that, he knew, was not *his* funeral. All he wanted was Binhart.

"Binhart 's in Guayaquil," McGlade suddenly announced.

"How d' you know that?" promptly demanded Blake.

"I know the man who sneaked him out from Balboa. He got sixty dollars for it. I can take you to him. Binhart 'd picked up a medicine-chest and a bag of instruments from a broken-down doctor at Colon. He went aboard a Pacific liner as a doctor himself.

"What liner?"

"He went aboard the *Trunella.* He thought he 'd get down to Callao. But they tied the *Trunella* up at Guayaquil."

"And you say he 's there now?"

"Yes!"

"And aboard the *Trunella?*"

"Sure! He 's got to be aboard the *Trunella!*"

"Then why d' you say I can't get at him?"

"Because Guayaquil and the *Trunella* and the whole coast down there is tied up in quarantine. That whole harbor 's rotten with yellow-jack. It 's tied up as tight as a drum. You could n't get a boat on all the Pacific to touch that port these days!"

"But there 's got to be *something* going there!" contended Blake.

"They dare n't do it! They could n't get clearance—they could n't even get *pratique!* Once they got in there they 'd be held and given the blood-test and picketed with a gunboat for a month! And what 's more, they 've got that Alfaro revolution on down there! They 've got boat-patrols up and down the coast, keeping a lookout for gunrunners!"

Blake, at this last word, raised his ponderous head.

"The boat-patrols would n't phase me," he announced. His thoughts, in fact, were al-

ready far ahead, marshaling themselves about other things.

"You 've a weakness for yellow fever?" inquired the ironic McGlade.

"I guess it 'd take more than a few fever germs to throw me off that trail," was the detective's abstracted retort. He was recalling certain things that the russet-faced Pip Tankred had told him. And before everything else he felt that it would be well to get in touch with that distributor of bridge equipment and phonograph records.

"You don't mean you 're going to try to get into Guayaquil?" demanded McGlade.

"If Connie Binhart 's down there I 've got to go and get him," was Never-Fail Blake's answer.

. . . . .

The following morning Blake, having made sure of his ground, began one of his old-time "investigations" of that unsuspecting worthy known as Pip Tankred.

This investigation involved a hurried journey back to Colon, the expenditure of much

money in cable tolls, the examination of records that were both official and unofficial, the asking of many questions and the turning up of dimly remembered things on which the dust of time had long since settled.

It was followed by a return to Panama, a secret trip several miles up the coast to look over a freighter placidly anchored there, a dolorous-appearing coast-tramp with unpainted upperworks and a rusty red hull. The side-plates of this red hull, Blake observed, were as pitted and scarred as the face of an Egyptian obelisk. Her ventilators were askew and her funnel was scrofulous and many of her rivet-heads seemed to be eaten away. But this was not once a source of apprehension to the studious-eyed detective.

The following evening he encountered Tankred himself, as though by accident, on the veranda of the Hotel Angelini. The latter, at Blake's invitation, sat down for a cocktail and a quiet smoke.

They sat in silence for some time, watching the rain that deluged the city, the warm de-

vitalizing rain that unedged even the fieriest of Signor Angelini's stimulants.

"Pip," Blake very quietly announced, "you 're going to sail for Guayaquil to-morrow!"

"Am I?" queried the unmoved Pip.

"You 're going to start for Guayaquil to-morrow," repeated Blake, "and you 're going to take me along with you!"

"My friend," retorted Pip, emitting a curling geyser of smoke as long and thin as a pool-que, "you 're sure laborin' under the misapprehension this steamer o' mine is a Pacific mailer! But she ain't, Blake!"

"I admit that," quietly acknowledged the other man. "I saw her yesterday!"

"And she don't carry no passengers—she ain't allowed to," announced her master.

"But she 's going to carry me," asserted Blake, lighting a fresh cigar.

"What as?" demanded Tankred. And he fixed Blake with a belligerent eye as he put the question.

"As an old friend of yours!"

"And then what?" still challenged the other.

"As a man who knows your record, in the next place. And on the next count, as the man who 's wise to those phony bills of lading of yours, and those doped-up clearance papers, and those cases of carbines you 've got down your hold labeled bridge equipment, and that nitro and giant-caps, and that hundred thousand rounds of smokeless you 're running down there as phonograph records!"

Tankred continued to smoke.

"You ever stop to wonder," he finally inquired, "if it ain't kind o' flirtin' with danger knowin' so much about me and my freightin' business?"

"No, you 're doing the coquetting in this case, I guess!"

"Then I ain't standin' for no rivals—not on this coast!"

The two men, so dissimilar in aspect and yet so alike in their accidental attitudes of an uncouth belligerency, sat staring at each other.

"You 're going to take me to Guayaquil," repeated Blake.

"That 's where you 're dead wrong," was the calmly insolent rejoinder. "I ain't even *goin'* to Guayaquil."

"I say you are."

Tankred's smile translated his earlier deliberateness into open contempt.

"You seem to forget that this here town you 're beefin' about lies a good thirty-five miles up the Guayas River. And if I 'm gun-runnin' for Alfaro, as you say, I naturally ain't navigatin' streams where they 'd be able to pick me off the bridge-deck with a fishin'-pole!"

"But you 're going to get as close to Guayaquil as you can, and you know it."

"Do I?" said the man with the up-tilted cigar.

"Look here, Pip," said Blake, leaning closer over the table towards him. "I don't give a tinker's dam about Alfaro and his two-cent revolution. I 'm not sitting up worrying over him or his junta or how he gets his am-

munition. But I want to get into Guayaquil, and this is the only way I can do it!"

For the first time Tankred turned and studied Lim.

"What d' you want to get into Guayaquil for?" he finally demanded. Blake knew that nothing was to be gained by beating about the bush.

"There 's a man I want down there, and I 'm going down to get him!"

"Who is he?"

"That 's my business," retorted Blake.

"And gettin' into Guayaquil 's your business!" Tankred snorted back.

"All I 'm going to say is he 's a man from up North—and he 's not in your line of business, and never was and never will be!"

"How do I know that?"

"You 'll have my word for it!"

Tankred swung round on him.

"D' you realize you 'll have to sneak ashore in a *lancha* and pass a double line o' patrol? And then crawl into a town that 's reekin' with yellow-jack, a town you 're not likely to

crawl out of again inside o' three months?"

"I know all that!" acknowledged Blake.

For the second time Tankred turned and studied the other man.

"And you 're still goin' after your gen'leman friend from up North?" he inquired.

"Pip, I 've got to get that man!"

"You 've got 'o?"

"I 've got to, and I 'm going to!"

Tankred threw his cigar-end away and laughed leisurely and quietly.

"Then what 're we sittin' here arguin' about, anyway? If it 's settled, it 's settled, ain't it?"

"Yes, I think it 's settled!"

Again Tankred laughed.

"But take it from me, my friend, you 'll sure see some rough goin' this next few days!"

XII

AS Tankred had intimated, Blake's journey southward from Panama was anything but comfortable traveling. The vessel was verminous, the food was bad, and the heat was oppressive. It was a heat that took the life out of the saturated body, a thick and burdening heat that hung like a heavy gray blanket on a gray sea which no rainfall seemed able to cool.

But Blake uttered no complaint. By day he smoked under a sodden awning, rained on by funnel cinders. By night he stood at the rail. He stood there, by the hour together, watching with wistful and haggard eyes the Alpha of Argo and the slowly rising Southern Cross. Whatever his thoughts, as he watched those lonely Southern skies, he kept them to himself.

It was the night after they had swung about

and were steaming up the Gulf of Guayaquil under a clear sky that Tankred stepped down to Blake's sultry little cabin and wakened him from a sound sleep.

"It 's time you were gettin' your clothes on," he announced.

"Getting my clothes on?" queried Blake through the darkness.

"Yes, you can't tell what we 'll bump into, any time now!"

The wakened sleeper heard the other man moving about in the velvety black gloom.

"What 're you doing there?" was his sharp question as he heard the squeak and slam of a shutter.

"Closin' this dead-light, of course," explained Tankred. A moment later he switched on the electric globe at the bunk-head. "We 're gettin' in pretty close now and we 're goin' with our lights doused!"

He stood for a moment, staring down at the sweat-dewed white body on the bunk, heaving for breath in the closeness of the little cabin. His mind was still touched into

mystery by the spirit housed in that uncouth and undulatory flesh. He was still piqued by the vast sense of purpose which Blake carried somewhere deep within his seemingly tepid-willed carcass, like the calcinated pearl at the center of an oyster.

"You 'd better turn out!" he called back as he stepped into the engulfing gloom of the gangway.

Blake rolled out of his berth and dressed without haste or excitement. Already, overhead, he could hear the continuous tramping of feet, with now and then a quiet-noted order from Tankred himself. He could hear other noises along the ship's side, as though a landing-ladder were being bolted and lowered along the rusty plates.

When he went up on deck he found the boat in utter darkness. To that slowly moving mass, for she was now drifting ahead under quarter-speed, this obliteration of light imparted a sense of stealthiness. This note of suspense, of watchfulness, of illicit adventure, was reflected in the very tones of the motley

deckhands who brushed past him in the humid velvety blackness.

As he stood at the rail, staring ahead through this blackness, Blake could see a light here and there along the horizon. These lights increased in number as the boat steamed slowly on. Then, far away in the roadstead ahead of them, he made out an entire cluster of lights, like those of a liner at anchor. Then he heard the tinkle of a bell below deck, and he realized that the engines had stopped.

In the lull of the quieted ship's screw he could hear the wash of distant surf, faint and phantasmal above the material little near-by boat-noises. Then came a call, faint and muffled, like the complaining note of a harbor gull. A moment later the slow creak of oars crept up to Blake's straining ears. Then out of the heart of the darkness that surrounded him, not fifty feet away, he saw emerge one faint point of light, rising and falling with a rhythm as sleepy as the slow creak of the oars. On each side of it other small lights sprang up. They were close be-

side the ship, by this time, a flotilla of lights, and each light, Blake finally saw, came from a lantern that stood deep in the bottom of a boat, a lantern that had been covered with a square of matting or sail-cloth, until some prearranged signal from the drifting steamer elicited its answering flicker of light. Then they swarmed about the oily water, shifting and swaying on their course like a cluster of fireflies, alternately dark and luminous in the dip and rise of the ground-swell. Within each small aura of radiance the watcher at the rail could see a dusky and quietly moving figure, the faded blue of a denim garment, the brown of bare arms, or the sinews of a straining neck. Once he caught the whites of a pair of eyes turned up towards the ship's deck. He could also see the running and wavering lines of fire as the oars puddled and backed in the phosphorescent water under the gloomy steel hull. Then he heard a low-toned argument in Spanish. A moment later the flotilla of small boats had fastened to the ship's side, like a litter of suckling pigs to a sow's breast.

Every light went out again, every light except a faint glow as a guide to the first boat at the foot of the landing-ladder. Along this ladder Blake could hear barefooted figures padding and grunting as cases and bales were cautiously carried down and passed from boat to boat.

He swung nervously about as he felt a hand clutch his arm. He found Tankred speaking quietly into his ear.

"There 'll be one boat over," that worthy was explaining. "One boat—you take that—the last one! And you 'd better give the *guinney* a ten-dollar bill for his trouble!"

"All right! I 'm ready!" was Blake's low-toned reply as he started to move forward with the other man.

"Not yet! Not yet!" was the other's irritable warning, as Blake felt himself pushed back. "You stay where you are! We 've got a half-hour's hard work ahead of us yet!"

As Blake leaned over the rail again, watching and listening, he began to realize that the work was indeed hard, that there was some

excuse for Tankred's ill-temper. Most men, he acknowledged, would feel the strain, where one misstep or one small mistake might undo the work of months. Beyond that, however, Blake found little about which to concern himself. Whether it was legal or illegal did not enter his mind. That a few thousand tin-sworded soldiers should go armed or unarmed was to him a matter of indifference. It was something not of his world. It did not impinge on his own jealously guarded circle of activity, on his own task of bringing a fugitive to justice. And as his eyes strained through the gloom at the cluster of lights far ahead in the roadstead he told himself that it was there that his true goal lay, for it was there that the *Trunella* must ride at anchor and Binhart must be.

Then he looked wonderingly back at the flotilla under the rail, for he realized that every movement and murmur of life there had come to a sudden stop. It was a cessation of all sound, a silence as ominously complete as that of a summer woodland when a hawk soars

overhead. Even the small light deep in the bottom of the first *lancha* tied to the landing-ladder had been suddenly quenched.

Blake, staring apprehensively out into the gloom, caught the sound of a soft and feverish throbbing. His disturbed mind had just registered the conclusion that this sound must be the throbbing of a passing marine-engine, when the thought was annihilated by a second and more startling occurrence.

Out across the blackness in front of him suddenly flashed a white saber of light. For one moment it circled and wavered restlessly about, feeling like a great finger along the gray surface of the water. Then it smote full on Blake and the deck where he stood, blinding him with its glare, picking out every object and every listening figure as plainly as a calcium picks out a scene on the stage.

Without conscious thought Blake dropped lower behind the ship's rail. He sank still lower, until he found himself down on his hands and knees beside a rope coil. As he did so he heard the call of a challenging Span-

ish voice, a murmur of voices, and then a repeated command.

There was no answer to this challenge. Then came another command and then silence again. Then a faint thrill arrowed through Blake's crouching body, for from somewhere close behind him a gun-shot rang out and was repeated again and again. Blake knew, at that sound, that Tankred or one of his men was firing straight into the dial of the searchlight, that Tankred himself intended to defy what must surely be an Ecuadorean gunboat. The detective was oppressed by the thought that his own jealously nursed plan might at any moment get a knock on the head.

At almost the same time the peevishly indignant Blake could hear the tinkle of the engine-room bell below him and then the thrash of the screw wings. The boat began to move forward, dangling the knocking and rocking flotilla of *lanchas* and surf-boats at her side, like a deer-mouse making off with its young. Then came sharp cries of protest, in Spanish, and more cries and curses in harbor-

English, and a second engine-room signal and a cessation of the screw thrashings. This was followed by a shower of carbine-shots and the plaintive whine of bullets above the upper-works, the crack and thud of lead against the side-plates. At the same time Blake heard the scream of a denim-clad figure that suddenly pitched from the landing-ladder into the sea. Then came an answering volley, from somewhere close below Blake. He could not tell whether it was from the boat-flotilla or from the port-holes above it. But he knew that Tankred and his men were returning the gunboat's fire.

Blake, by this time, was once more thinking lucidly. Some of the cases in those surf-boats, he remembered, held giant-caps and dynamite, and he knew what was likely to happen if a bullet struck them. He also remembered that he was still exposed to the carbine fire from behind the searchlight.

He stretched out, flat on the deck-boards, and wormed his way slowly and ludicrously aft. He did not bring those uncouth vermic-

ulations to a stop until he was well back in the shelter of a rusty capstan, cut off from the light by a lifeboat swinging on its davits. As he clambered to his feet again he saw this light suddenly go out and then reappear. As it did so he could make out a patrol-boat, gray and low-bodied, slinking forward through the gloom. He could see that boat crowded with men, men in uniform, and he could see that each man carried a carbine. He could also see that it would surely cut across the bow of his own steamer. A moment later he knew that Tankred himself had seen this, for high above the crack and whine of the shooting and the tumult of voices he could now hear Tankred's blasphemous shouts.

"Cut loose those boats!" bellowed the frantic gun-runner. Then he repeated the command, apparently in Spanish. And to this came an answering babel of cries and expostulations and counter-cries. But still the firing from behind the searchlight kept up. Blake could see a half-naked seaman with a carpenter's ax skip monkey-like down the landing-

ladder. He saw the naked arm strike with the ax, the two hands suddenly catch at the bare throat, and the figure fall back in a huddle against the red-stained wooden steps.

Blake also saw, to his growing unrest, that the firing was increasing in volume, that at the front of the ship sharp volley and counter-volley was making a pandemonium of the very deck on which he knelt. For by this time the patrol-boat with the carbineers had reached the steamer's side and a boarding-ladder had been thrown across her quarter. And Blake began to comprehend that he was in the most undesirable of situations. He could hear the repeated clang of the engine-room telegraph and Tankred's frenzied and ineffectual bellow of "Full steam ahead! For the love o' Christ, full ahead down there!"

Through all that bedlam Blake remained resentfully cool, angrily clear-thoughted. He saw that the steamer did not move forward. He concluded the engine-room to be deserted. And he saw both the futility and the danger of remaining where he was.

He crawled back to where he remembered the rope-coil lay, dragging the loose end of it back after him, and then lowering it over the ship's side until it touched the water. Then he shifted this rope along the rail until it swung over the last of the line of surf-boats that bobbed and thudded against the side-plates of the gently rolling steamer. About him, all the while, he could hear the shouts of men and the staccato crack of the rifles. But he saw to it that his rope was well tied to the rail-stanchion. Then he clambered over the rail itself, and with a double twist of the rope about his great leg let himself ponderously down over the side.

He swayed there, for a moment, until the roll of the ship brought him thumping against the rusty plates again. At the same moment the shifting surf-boat swung in under him. Releasing his hold, he went tumbling down between the cartridge-cases and the boat-thwarts.

This boat, he saw, was still securely tied to its mate, one of the larger-bodied *lanchas,* and

he had nothing with which to sever the rope. His first impulse was to reach for his revolver and cut through the manilla strands by means of a half-dozen quick shots. But this, he knew, would too noisily announce his presence there. So he fell on his knees and peered and prodded about the boat bottom. There, to his surprise, he saw the huddled body of a dead man, face down. This body he turned over, running an exploring hand along the belt-line. As he had hoped, he found a heavy nine-inch knife there.

He was dodging back to the bow of the surf-boat when a uniformed figure carrying a rifle came scuttling and shouting down the landing-ladder. Blake's spirits sank as he saw that figure. He knew now that his movement had been seen and understood. He knew, too, as he saw the figure come scrambling out over the rocking boats, what capture would mean.

He had the last strand of the rope severed before the Ecuadorean with the carbine reached the *lancha* next to him. He still felt,

once he was free, that he could use his revolver and get away. But before Blake could push off a sinewy brown hand reached out and clutched the gunwale of the liberated boat. Blake ignored the clutching hand. But, relying on his own sheer strength, he startled the owning of the hand by suddenly flinging himself forward, seizing the carbine barrel, and wresting it free. A second later it disappeared beneath the surface of the water.

That impassioned brown hand, however, still clung to the boat's gunwale. It clung there determinedly, blindly—and Blake knew there was no time for a struggle. He brought the heavy-bladed knife down on the clinging fingers. It was a stroke like that of a cleaver on a butcher's block. In the strong white light that still played on them he could see the flash of teeth in the man's opened mouth, the upturn of the staring eye-balls as the severed fingers fell away and he screamed aloud with pain.

But with one quick motion of his gorilla-like arms Blake pushed his boat free, telling

himself there was still time, warning himself to keep cool and make the most of every chance. Yet as he turned to take up the oars he saw that he had been discovered by the Ecuadoreans on the freighter's deck, that his flight was not to be as simple as he had expected. He saw the lean brown face, picked out by the white light, as a carbineer swung his short-barreled rifle out over the rail—and the man in the surf-boat knew by that face what was coming.

His first impulse was to reach into his pocket for his revolver. But that, he knew, was already too late, for a second man had joined the first and a second rifle was already swinging round on him. His next thought was to dive over the boat's side. This thought had scarcely formulated itself, however, before he heard the bark of the rifle and saw the puff of smoke.

At the same moment he felt the rip and tug of the bullet through the loose side-folds of his coat. And with that rip and tug came a third thought, over which he did not waver.

He threw up his hands, sharply, and flung himself headlong across the body of the dead man in the bottom of the surf-boat.

He fell heavily, with a blow that shook the wind from his body. But as he lay there he knew better than to move. He lay there, scarcely daring to breathe, dreading that the rise and fall of his breast would betray his ruse, praying that his boat would veer about so his body would be in the shadow. For he knew the two waiting carbines were still pointed at him.

He lay there, counting the seconds, knowing that he and his slowly drifting surf-boat were still in the full white fulgor of the wavering searchlight. He lay there as a second shot came whistling overhead, spitting into the water within three feet of him. Then a third bullet came, this time tearing through the wood of the boat bottom beside him. And he still waited, without moving, wondering what the next shot would do. He still waited, his passive body horripilating with a vast indignation at the thought of the injustice of it all,

at the thought that he must lie there and let half-baked dagoes shower his unprotesting back with lead. But he lay there, still counting the seconds, as the boat drifted slowly out on the quietly moving tide.

Then a new discovery disturbed him. It obliterated his momentary joy at the thought that they were no longer targeting down at him. He could feel the water slowly rising about his prostrate body. He realized that the boat in which he lay was filling. He calmly figured out that with the body of the dead man and the cartridge-cases about him it was carrying a dead weight of nearly half a ton. And through the bullet hole in its bottom the water was rushing in.

Yet he could do nothing. He could make no move. For at the slightest betrayal of life, he knew, still another volley would come from that ever-menacing steamer's deck. He counted the minutes, painfully, methodically, feeling the water rise higher and higher about his body. The thought of this rising water and what it meant did not fill him with panic.

He seemed more the prey of a deep and sullen resentment that his plans should be so gratuitously interfered with, that his approach to the *Trunella* should be so foolishly delayed, that so many cross-purposes should postpone and imperil his quest of Binhart.

He knew, by the slowly diminishing sounds, that he was drifting further and further away from Tankred and his crowded fore-deck. But he was still within the area of that ever-betraying searchlight. Some time, he knew, he must drift beyond it. But until that moment came he dare make no move to keep himself afloat.

By slowly turning his head an inch or two he was able to measure the height of the gunwale above the water. Then he made note of where an oar lay, asking himself how long he could keep afloat on a timber so small, wondering how far he could be from land. Then he suddenly fell to questioning if the waters of that coast were shark infested.

He was still debating the problem when he became conscious of a change about him. A

sudden pall of black fell like balm on his startled face. The light was no longer there. He found himself engulfed in a relieving, fortifying darkness, a darkness that brought him to his feet in the slowly moving boat. He was no longer visible to the rest of the world. At a breath, almost, he had passed into eclipse.

His first frantic move was to tug and drag the floating body at his feet to the back of the boat and roll it overboard. Then he waded forward and one by one carefully lifted the cases of ammunition and tumbled them over the side. One only he saved, a smaller wooden box which he feverishly pried open with his knife and emptied into the sea. Then he flung away the top boards, placing the empty box on the seat in front of him. Then he fell on his hands and knees, fingering along the boat bottom until he found the bullet-hole through which the water was boiling up.

Once he had found it he began tearing at his clothes like a madman, for the water was now alarmingly high. These rags and shreds

of clothing he twisted together and forced into the hole, tamping them firmly into place with his revolver-barrel.

Then he caught up the empty wooden box from the boat seat and began to bale. He baled solemnly, as though his very soul were in it. He was oblivious of the strange scene silhouetted against the night behind him, standing out as distinctly as though it were a picture thrown on a sheet from a magic-lantern slide—a circle of light surrounding a drifting and rusty-sided ship on which tumult had turned into sudden silence. He was oblivious of his own wet clothing and his bruised body and the dull ache in his leg wound of many months ago. He was intent only on the fact that he was lowering the water in his surf-boat, that he was slowly drifting further and further away from the enemies who had interfered with his movements, and that under the faint spangle of lights which he could still see in the offing on his right lay an anchored liner, and that somewhere on that liner lay a man for whom he was looking.

XIII

ONCE assured that his surf-boat would keep afloat, Blake took the oars and began to row. But even as he swung the boat lumberingly about he realized that he could make no headway with such a load, for almost a foot of water still surged along its bottom. So he put down the oars and began to bale again. He did not stop until the boat was emptied. Then he carefully replugged the bullet-hole, took up the oars again, and once more began to row.

He rowed, always keeping his bow towards the far-off spangle of lights which showed where the *Trunella* lay at anchor.

He rowed doggedly, determinedly. He rowed until his arms were tired and his back ached. But still he did not stop. It occurred to him, suddenly, that there might be a tide running against him, that with all his

labor he might be making no actual headway. Disturbed by this thought, he fixed his attention on two almost convergent lights on shore, rowing with renewed energy as he watched them. He had the satisfaction of seeing these two lights slowly come together, and he knew he was making some progress.

Still another thought came to him as he rowed doggedly on. And that was the fear that at any moment, now, the quick equatorial morning might dawn. He had no means of judging the time. To strike a light was impossible, for his matches were water-soaked. Even his watch, he found, had been stopped by its bath in sea-water. But he felt that long hours had passed since midnight, that it must be close to the break of morning. And the fear of being overtaken by daylight filled him with a new and more frantic energy.

He rowed feverishly on, until the lights of the *Trunella* stood high above him and he could hear the lonely sound of her bells as the watch was struck. Then he turned and studied the dark hull of the steamer as she

loomed up closer in front of him. He could see her only in outline, at first, picked out here and there by a light. But there seemed something disheartening, something intimidating, in her very quietness, something suggestive of a plague-ship deserted by crew and passengers alike. That dark and silent hull at which he stared seemed to house untold possibilities of evil.

Yet Blake remembered that it also housed Binhart. And with that thought in his mind he no longer cared to hesitate. He rowed in under the shadowy counter, bumping about the rudder-post. Then he worked his way forward, feeling quietly along her side-plates, foot by foot.

He had more than half circled the ship before he came to her landing-ladder. The grilled platform at the bottom of this row of steps stood nearly as high as his shoulders, as though the ladder-end had been hauled up for the night.

Blake balanced himself on the bow of his surf-boat and tugged and strained until he

gained the ladder-bottom. He stood there, recovering his breath, for a moment or two, peering up towards the inhospitable silence above him. But still he saw no sign of life. No word or challenge was flung down at him. Then, after a moment's thought, he lay flat on the grill and deliberately pushed the surf-boat off into the darkness. He wanted no more of it. He knew, now, there could be no going back.

He climbed cautiously up the slowly swaying steps, standing for a puzzled moment at the top and peering about him. Then he crept along the deserted deck, where a month of utter idleness, apparently, had left discipline relaxed. He shied away from the lights, here and there, that dazzled his eyes after his long hours of darkness. With an instinct not unlike that which drives the hiding wharf-rat into the deepest corner at hand, he made his way down through the body of the ship. He shambled and skulked his way down, a hatless and ragged and uncouth figure, wandering on along gloomy gangways

and corridors until he found himself on the threshold of the engine-room itself.

He was about to back out of this entrance and strike still deeper when he found himself confronted by an engineer smoking a short brier-root pipe. The pale blue eyes of this sandy-headed engineer were wide with wonder, startled and incredulous wonder, as they stared at the ragged figure in the doorway.

"Where in the name o' God did *you* come from?" demanded the man with the brier-root pipe.

"I came out from Guayaquil," answered Blake, reaching searchingly down in his wet pocket. "And I can't go back."

The sandy-headed man backed away.

"From the fever camps?"

Blake could afford to smile at the movement.

"Don't worry—there 's no fever 'round me. *That 's* what I 've been through!" And he showed the bullet-holes through his tattered coat-cloth.

"How 'd you get here?"

"Rowed out in a surf-boat—and I can't go back!"

The sandy-headed engineer continued to stare at the uncouth figure in front of him, to stare at it with vague and impersonal wonder. And in facing that sandy-headed stranger, Blake new, he was facing a judge whose decision was to be of vast moment in his future destiny, whose word, perhaps, was to decide on the success or failure of much wandering about the earth.

"I can't go back!" repeated Blake, as he reached out and dropped a clutter of gold into the palm of the other man. The pale blue eyes looked at the gold, looked out along the gangway, and then looked back at the waiting stranger.

"That Alfaro gang after you?" he inquired.

"They 're *all* after me!" answered the swaying figure in rags. They were talking together, by this time, almost in whispers, like two conspirators. The young engineer seemed

puzzled. But a wave of relief swept through Blake when in the pale blue eyes he saw almost a look of pity.

"What d' you want me to do?" he finally asked.

Blake, instead of answering that question, asked another.

"When do you move out of here?"

The engineer put the coins in his pocket.

"Before noon to-morrow, thank God! The *Yorktown* ought to be here by morning—she 's to give us our release!"

"Then you 'll sail by noon?"

"We 've *got* to! They 've tied us up here over a month, without reason. They worked that old yellow-jack gag—and not a touch of fever aboard all that time!"

A great wave of contentment surged through Blake's weary body. He put his hand up on the smaller man's shoulder.

"Then you just get me out o' sight until we 're off, and I 'll fix things so you 'll never be sorry for it!"

The pale-eyed engineer studied the prob-

lem. Then he studied the figure in front of him.

"There 's nothing crooked behind this?"

Blake forced a laugh from his weary lungs. "I 'll prove that in two days by wireless—and pay first-class passage to the next port of call!"

"I 'm fourth engineer on board here, and the Old Man would sure fire me, if—"

"But you need n't even know about me," contended Blake. "Just let me crawl in somewhere where I can sleep!"

"You need it, all right, by that face of yours!"

"I sure do," acknowledged the other as he stood awaiting his judge's decision.

"Then I 'd better get you down to my bunk. But remember, I can only stow you there until we get under way—perhaps not that long!"

He stepped cautiously out and looked along the gangway. "This is your funeral, mind, when the row comes. You 've got to face that, yourself!"

"Oh, I 'll face it, all right!" was Blake's

calmly contented answer. "All I want now is about nine hours' sleep!"

"Come on, then," said the fourth engineer. And Blake followed after as he started deeper down into the body of the ship. And already, deep below him, he could hear the stokers at work in their hole.

XIV

AFTER seven cataleptic hours of unbroken sleep Blake awakened to find his shoulder being prodded and shaken by the pale-eyed fourth engineer. The stowaway's tired body, during that sleep, had soaked in renewed strength as a squeezed sponge soaks up water. He could afford to blink with impassive eyes up at the troubled face of the young man wearing the oil-stained cap.

"What 's wrong?" he demanded, awakening to a luxurious comprehension of where he was and what he had escaped. Then he sat up in the narrow berth, for it began to dawn on him that the engines of the *Trunella* were not in motion. "Why are n't we under way?"

"They 're having trouble up there, with the *Commandante*. We can't get off inside of an hour—and anything 's likely to happen in that

time. That 's why I 've got to get you out of here!"

"Where 'll you get me?" asked Blake. He was on his feet by this time, arraying himself in his wet and ragged clothing.

"That 's what I 've been talking over with the Chief," began the young engineer. Blake wheeled about and fixed him with his eye.

"Did you let your Chief in on this?" he demanded, and he found it hard to keep his anger in check.

"I had to let him in on it," complained the other. "If it came to a line up or a searching party through here, they 'd spot you first thing. You 're not a passenger; you 're not signed; you 're not anything!"

"Well, supposing I 'm not?"

"Then they 'd haul you back and give you a half year in that *Lazaretto* o' theirs!"

"Well, what do I have to do to keep from being hauled back?"

"You 'll have to be one o' the workin' crew, until we get off. The Chief says that, and I think he 's right!"

A vague foreboding filled Blake's soul. He had imagined that the ignominy and agony of physical labor was a thing of the past with him. And he was still sore in every sinew and muscle of his huge body.

"You don't mean stoke-hole work?" he demanded.

The fourth engineer continued to look worried.

"You don't happen to know anything about machinery, do you?" he began.

"Of course I do," retorted Blake, thinking gratefully of his early days as a steamfitter.

"Then why could n't I put you in a cap and jumper and work you in as one of the greasers?"

"What do you mean by greasers?"

"That 's an oiler in the engine-room. It—it may not be the coolest place on earth, in this latitude, but it sure beats the stoke-hole!"

And it was in this way, thirty minutes later, that Blake became a greaser in the engine-room of the *Trunella.*

Already, far above him, he could hear the

rattle and shriek of winch-engines and the far-off muffled roar of the whistle, rumbling its triumph of returning life. Already the great propeller engines themselves had been tested, after their weeks of idleness, languidly stretching and moving like an awakening sleeper, slowly swinging their solemn tons forward through their projected cycles and then as solemnly back again.

About this vast pyramid-shaped machinery, galleried like a Latin house-court, tremulous with the breath of life that sang and hissed through its veins, the new greaser could see his fellow workers with their dripping oil-cans, groping gallery by gallery up towards the square of daylight that sifted down into the oil-scented pit where he stood. He could see his pale-eyed friend, the fourth engineer, spanner in hand, clinging to a moving network of steel like a spider to its tremulous web—and in his breast, for the first time, a latent respect for that youth awakened. He could see other greasers wriggling about between intricate shafts and wheels, crawling

cat-like along narrow steel ledges, mounting steep metal ladders guarded by hot hand rails, peering into oil boxes, "worrying" the vacuum pump, squatting and kneeling about iron floors where oil-pits pooled and pump-valves clacked and electric machines whirred and the antiphonal song of the mounting steam roared like music in the ears of the listening Blake, aching as he was for the first relieving throb of the screws. Stolidly and calmly the men about him worked, threatened by flailing steel, hissed at by venomously quiescent powers, beleaguered by mysteriously moving shafts, surrounded by countless valves and an inexplicable tangle of pipes, hemmed in by an incomprehensible labyrinth of copper wires, menaced by the very shimmering joints and rods over which they could run such carelessly affectionate fingers.

Blake could see the assistant engineers, with their eyes on the pointers that stood out against two white dials. He could see the Chief, the Chief whom he would so soon have to buy over and placate, moving about nervous

and alert. Then he heard the tinkle of the telegraph bell, and the repeated gasp of energy as the engineers threw the levers. He could hear the vicious hum of the reversing-engines, and then the great muffled cough of power as the ponderous valve-gear was thrown into position and the vaster machinery above him was coerced into a motion that seemed languid yet relentless.

He could see the slow rise and fall of the great cranks. He could hear the renewed signals and bells tinkles, the more insistent clack of pumps, the more resolute rise and fall of the ponderous cranks. And he knew that they were at last under way. He gave no thought to the heat of the oil-dripping pit in which he stood. He was oblivious of the perilous steel that whirred and throbbed about him. He was unconscious of the hot hand rails and the greasy foot-ways and the mingling odor of steam and parching lubricant and ammonia-gas from a leaking "beef engine." He quite forgot the fact that his *dungaree* jumper was wet with sweat, that his cap was already fouled

with oil. All he knew was that he and Binhart were at last under way.

He was filled with a new lightness of spirit as he felt the throb of "full speed ahead" shake the steel hull about which he so contentedly climbed and crawled. He found something fortifying in the thought that this vast hull was swinging out to her appointed sea lanes, that she was now intent on a way from which no caprice could turn her. There seemed something appeasingly ordered and implacable in the mere revolutions of the engines. And as those engines settled down to their labors the intent-eyed men about him fell almost as automatically into the routines of toil as did the steel mechanism itself.

When at the end of the first four-houred watch a gong sounded and the next crew filed cluttering in from the half-lighted between-deck gangways and came sliding down the polished steel stair rails, Blake felt that his greatest danger was over.

There would still be an occasional palm to grease, he told himself, an occasional bit

of pad money to be paid out. But he could meet those emergencies with the fortitude of a man already inured to the exactions of venal accomplices.

Then a new discovery came to him. It came as he approached the chief engineer, with the object in view of throwing a little light on his presence there. And as he looked into that officer's coldly indignant eye he awakened to the fact that he was no longer on land, but afloat on a tiny world with an autocracy and an authority of its own. He was in a tiny world, he saw, where his career and his traditions were not to be reckoned with, where he ranked no higher than conch-niggers and beach-combers and *cargadores*. He was a *dungaree*-clad greaser in an engine-room, and he was promptly ordered back with the rest of his crew. He was not even allowed to talk.

When his watch came round he went on duty again. He saw the futility of revolt, until the time was ripe. He went through his appointed tasks with the solemn precision of

an apprentice. He did what he was commanded to do. Yet sometimes the heat would grow so intense that the great sweating body would have to shamble to a ventilator and there drink in long drafts of the cooler air. The pressure of invisible hoops about the great heaving chest would then release itself, the haggard face would regain some touch of color, and the new greaser would go back to his work again. One or two of the more observant toilers about him, experienced in engine-room life, marveled at the newcomer and the sense of mystery which hung over him. One or two of them fell to wondering what inner spirit could stay him through those four-houred ordeals of heat and labor.

Yet they looked after him with even more inquisitive eyes when, on the second day out, he was peremptorily summoned to the Captain's room. What took place in that room no one in the ship ever actually knew.

But the large-bodied stowaway returned below-decks, white of face and grim of jaw. He went back to his work in silence, in dogged

and unbroken silence which those about him knew enough to respect.

It was whispered about, it is true, that among other things a large and ugly-looking revolver had been taken from his clothing, and that he had been denied the use of the ship's wireless service. A steward outside the Captain's door, it was also whispered, had overheard the shipmaster's angry threat to put the stowaway in irons for the rest of the voyage and return him to the Ecuadorean authorities. It was rumored, too, that late in the afternoon of the same day, when the new greaser had complained of faintness and was seeking a breath of fresh air at the foot of a midships deck-ladder, he had chanced to turn and look up at a man standing on the promenade deck above him.

The two men stood staring at each other for several moments, and for all the balmy air about him the great body of the stranger just up from the engine-room had shivered and shaken, as though with a malarial chill.

What it meant, no one quite knew. Nor

could anything be added to that rumor, beyond the fact that the first-class passenger, who was known to be a doctor and who had stared so intently down at the quiet-eyed greaser, had turned the color of ashes and without a word had slipped away. And the bewilderment of the entire situation was further increased when the *Trunella* swung in at Callao and the large-bodied man of mystery was peremptorily and none too gently put ashore. It was noted, however, that the first-class passenger who had stared down at him from the promenade-deck remained aboard the vessel as she started southward again. It was further remarked that he seemed more at ease when Callao was left well behind, although he sat smoking side by side with the operator in the wireless room until the *Trunella* had steamed many miles southward on her long journey towards the Straits of Magellan.

XV

SEVEN days after the *Truncella* swung southward from Callao Never-Fail Blake, renewed as to habiliments and replenished as to pocket, embarked on a steamer bound for Rio de Janeiro.

He watched the plunging bow as it crept southward. He saw the heat and the gray sea-shimmer left behind him. He saw the days grow longer and the nights grow colder. He saw the Straits passed and the northward journey again begun. But he neither fretted nor complained of his fate.

After communicating by wireless with both Montevideo and Buenos Ayres and verifying certain facts of which he seemed already assured, he continued on his way to Rio. And over Rio he once more cast and pursed up his gently interrogative net, gathering in the discomforting information that Binhart had

already relayed from that city to a Lloyd-Brazileiro steamer. This steamer, he learned, was bound for Ignitos, ten thousand dreary miles up the Amazon.

Five days later Blake followed in a Clyde-built freighter. When well up the river he transferred to a rotten-timbered sidewheeler that had once done duty on the Mississippi, and still again relayed from river boat to river boat, move by move falling more and more behind his quarry.

The days merged into weeks, and the weeks into months. He suffered much from the heat, but more from the bad food and the bad water. For the first time in his life he found his body shaken with fever and was compelled to use quinin in great quantities. The attacks of insects, of insects that flew, that crawled, that tunneled beneath the skin, turned life into a torment. His huge triple-terraced neck became raw with countless wounds. But he did not stop by the way. His eyes became oblivious of the tangled and overcrowded life about him, of the hectic orchids and huge

butterflies and the flaming birds-of-paradise, of the echoing aisle ways between interwoven jungle growths, of the arching aërial roofs of verdure and the shadowy hanging-gardens from which by day parakeets chattered and monkeys screamed and by night ghostly armies of fireflies glowed. He was no longer impressed by that world of fierce appetites and fierce conflicts. He seemed to have attained to a secret inner calm, to an obsessional impassivity across which the passing calamities of existence only echoed. He merely recalled that he had been compelled to eat of disagreeable things and face undesirable emergencies, to drink of the severed Water-vine, to partake of monkey-steak and broiled parrot, to sleep in poisonous swamplands. His spirit, even with the mournful cry of night birds in his ears, had been schooled into the acceptance of a loneliness that to another might have seemed eternal and unendurable.

By the time he had reached the Pacific coast his haggard hound's eyes were more haggard than ever. His skin hung loose on his great

body, as though a vampire bat had drained it of its blood. But to his own appearance he gave scant thought. For new life came to him when he found definite traces of Binhart. These traces he followed up, one by one, until he found himself circling back eastward along the valley of the Magdalena. And down the Magdalena he went, still sure of his quarry, following him to Bogota, and on again from Bogota to Barranquilla, and on to Savanilla, where he embarked on a Hamburg-American steamer for Limon.

At Limon it was not hard to pick up the lost trail. But Binhart's movements, after leaving that port, became a puzzle to the man who had begun to pride himself on growing into knowledge of his adversary's inmost nature. For once Blake found himself uncertain as to the other's intentions. The fugitive now seemed possessed with an idea to get away from the sea, to strike inland at any cost, as though water had grown a thing of horror to him. He zigzagged from obscure village to village, as though determined to keep away

from all main-traveled avenues of traffic. Yet, move as he might, it was merely a matter of time and care to follow up the steps of a white man as distinctly individualized as Binhart.

This white man, it seemed, was at last giving way to the terror that must have been haunting him for months past. His movements became feverish, erratic, irrational. He traveled in strange directions and by strange means, by bullock-cart, by burro, by dug-out, sometimes on foot and sometimes on horseback. Sometimes he stayed over night at a rubber-gatherers' camp, sometimes he visited a banana plantation, bought a fresh horse, and pushed on again. When he reached the Province of Alajuela he made use of the narrow cattle passes, pressing on in a northwesterly direction along the valleys of the San Juan and the San Carlos River. A madness seemed to have seized him, a madness to make his way northward, ever northward.

Over heartbreaking mountainous paths,

through miasmic jungles, across sun-baked plateaus, chilled by night and scorched by day, chafed and sore, tortured by *niguas* and *coloradillas,* mosquitoes and *chigoes,* sleeping in verminous hay-thatched huts of bamboo bound together with bejuco-vine, mislead by lying natives and stolen from by peons, Blake day by day and week by week fought his way after his enemy. When worn to lightheadedness he drank *guaro* and great quantities of black coffee; when ill he ate quinin.

The mere act of pursuit had become automatic with him. He no longer remembered why he was seeking out this man. He no longer remembered the crime that lay at the root of that flight and pursuit. It was not often, in fact, that his thoughts strayed back to his old life. When he did think of it, it seemed only something too far away to remember, something phantasmal, something belonging to another world. There were times when all his journeying through steaming swamplands and forests of teak and satinwood and over indigo lagoons and mountain-

passes of moonlit desolation seemed utterly and unfathomably foolish. But he fought back such moods, as though they were a weakness. He let nothing deter him. He stuck to his trail, instinctively, doggedly, relentlessly.

It was at Chalavia that a peon named Tico Viquez came to Blake with the news of a white man lying ill of black-water fever in a native hut. For so much gold, Tico Viquez intimated, he would lead the señor to the hut in question.

Blake, who had no gold to spare, covered the startled peon with his revolver and commanded Viquez to take him to that hut. There was that in the white man's face which caused the peon to remember that life was sweet. He led the way through a reptilious swamp and into the fringe of a nispero forest, where they came upon a hut with a roof of corrugated iron and walls of wattled bamboo.

Blake, with his revolver in his hand and his guide held before him as a human shield, cautiously approached the door of this hut, for

he feared treachery. Then, with equal caution, he peered through the narrow doorway. He stood there for several moments, without moving.

Then he slipped his revolver back into his pocket and stepped into the hut. For there, in one corner of it, lay Binhart. He lay on a bed made of bull-hide stretched across a rough-timbered frame. Yet what Blake looked down on seemed more a shriveled mummy of Binhart than the man himself. A vague trouble took possession of the detective as he blinked calmly down at the glazed and sunken eyes, the gaunt neck, the childishly helpless body. He stood there, waiting until the man on the sagging bull-skin saw him.

"Hello, Jim!" said the sick man, in little more than a whisper.

"Hello, Connie!" was the other's answer. He picked up a palmetto frond and fought away the flies. The uncleanness of the place turned his stomach.

"What 's up, Connie?" he asked, sitting calmly down beside the narrow bed.

The sick man moved a hand, weakly, as though it were the yellow flapper of some wounded amphibian.

"The jig 's up!" he said. The faint mockery of a smile wavered across the painfully gaunt face. It reminded the other man of heat-lightning on a dark skyline. "You got me, Jim. But it won't do much good. I 'm going to cash in."

"What makes you say that?" argued Blake, studying the lean figure. There was a look of mild regret on his own sodden and haggard face. "What 's wrong with you, anyway?"

The man on the bed did not answer for some time. When he spoke, he spoke without looking at the other man.

"They said it was black-water fever. Then they said it was yellow-jack. But I know it 's not. I think it 's typhoid, or swamp fever. It 's worse than malaria. I dam' near burn up every night. I get out of my head. I 've done that three nights. That 's why the niggers won't come near me now!"

Blake leaned forward and fought away the flies again.

"Then it 's a good thing I got up with you."

The sick man rolled his eyes in their sockets, so as to bring his enemy into his line of vision.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because I 'm not going to let you die," was Blake's answer.

"You can't help it, Jim! The jig 's up!"

"I 'm going to get a litter and get you up out o' this hell-hole of a swamp," announced Blake. "I 'm going to have you carried up to the hills. Then I 'm going back to Chalavia to get a doctor o' some kind. Then I 'm going to put you on your feet again!"

Binhart slowly moved his head from side to side. Then the heat-lightning smile played about the hollow face again.

"It was some chase, Jim, was n't it?" he said, without looking at his old-time enemy.

Blake stared down at him with his haggard hound's eyes; there was no answering smile on his heavy lips, now furzed with their grizzled

growth of hair. There seemed something ignominious in such an end, something futile and self-frustrating. It was unjust. It left everything so hideously incomplete. He revolted against it with a sullen and senseless rage.

"By God, you 're not going to die!" declared the staring and sinewy-necked man at the bedside. "I say you 're not going to die. I 'm going to get you out o' here alive!"

A sweat of weakness stood out on Binhart's white face.

"Where to?" he asked, as he had asked once before. And his eyes remained closed as he put the question.

"To the pen," was the answer which rose to Blake's lips. But he did not utter the words. Instead, he rose impatiently to his feet. But the man on the bed must have sensed that unspoken response, for he opened his eyes and stared long and mournfully at his heavy-bodied enemy.

"You 'll never get me there!" he said, in little more than a whisper. "Never!"

XVI

BINHART was moved that night up into the hills. There he was installed in a bungalow of an abandoned banana plantation and a doctor was brought to his bedside. He was delirious by the time this doctor arrived, and his ravings through the night were a source of vague worry to his enemy. On the second day the sick man showed signs of improvement.

For three weeks Blake watched over Binhart, saw to his wants, journeyed to Chalavia for his food and medicines. When the fever was broken and Binhart began to gain strength the detective no longer made the trip to Chalavia in person. He preferred to remain with the sick man.

He watched that sick man carefully, jealously, hour by hour and day by day. A peon

servant was paid to keep up the vigil when Blake slept, as sleep he must.

But the strain was beginning to tell on him. He walked heavily. The asthmatic wheeze of his breathing became more audible. His earlier touch of malaria returned to him, and he suffered from intermittent chills and fever. The day came when Blake suggested it was about time for them to move on.

"Where to?" asked Binhart. Little had passed between the two men, but during all those silent nights and days each had been secretly yet assiduously studying the other.

"Back to New York," was Blake's indifferent-noted answer. Yet this indifference was a pretense, for no soul had ever hungered more for a white man's country than did the travel-worn and fever-racked Blake. But he had his part to play, and he did not intend to shirk it. They went about their preparations quietly, like two fellow excursionists making ready for a journey with which they were already over-familiar. It was while they sat

waiting for the guides and mules that Blake addressed himself to the prisoner.

"Connie," he said, "I 'm taking you back. It does n't make much difference whether I take you back dead or alive. But I 'm going to take you back."

The other man said nothing, but his slight head-movement was one of comprehension.

"So I just wanted to say there 's no side-stepping, no four-flushing, at this end of the trip!"

"I understand," was Binhart's listless response.

"I 'm glad you do," Blake went on in his dully monotonous voice. "Because I got where I can't stand any more breaks."

"All right, Jim," answered Binhart. They sat staring at each other. It was not hate that existed between them. It was something more dormant, more innate. It was something that had grown ineradicable; as fixed as the relationship between the hound and the hare. Each wore an air of careless listlessness, yet

each watched the other, every move, every moment.

It was as they made their way slowly down to the coast that Blake put an unexpected question to Binhart.

"Connie, where in hell did you plant that haul o' yours?"

This thing had been worrying Blake. Weeks before he had gone through every nook and corner, every pocket and crevice in Binhart's belongings.

The bank thief laughed a little. He had been growing stronger, day by day, and as his spirits had risen Blake's had seemed to recede.

"Oh, I left that up in the States, where it 'd be safe," he answered.

"What 'll you do about it?" Blake casually inquired.

"I can't tell, just yet," was Binhart's retort.

He rode on silent and thoughtful for several minutes. "Jim," he said at last, "we 're both about done for. There 's not much left for either of us. We 're going at this thing

wrong. There 's a lot o' money up there, for somebody. And *you* ought to get it!"

"What do you mean?" asked Blake. He resented the bodily weakness that was making burro-riding a torture.

"I mean it 's worth a hundred and fifty thousand dollars to you just to let me drop out. I 'd hand you over that much to quit the chase."

"It ain't me that 's chasing you, Connie. It 's the Law!" was Blake's quiet-toned response. And the other man knew he believed it.

"Well, you quit, and I 'll stand for the Law!"

"But, can't you see, they 'd never stand for you!"

"Oh, yes they would. I 'd just drop out, and they 'd forget about me. And you 'd have that pile to enjoy life with!"

Blake thought it over, ponderously, point by point. For not one fraction of a second could he countenance the thought of surrendering Binhart. Yet he wanted both his pris-

oner and his prisoner's haul; he wanted his final accomplishment to be complete.

"But how'd we ever handle the deal?" prompted the tired-bodied man on the burro.

"You remember a woman called Elsie Verriner?"

"Yes," acknowledged Blake, with a pang of regret which he could not fathom, at the mention of the name.

"Well, we could fix it through her."

"Does Elsie Verriner know where that pile is?" the detective inquired. His withered hulk of a body was warmed by a slow glow of anticipation. There was a woman, he remembered, whom he could count on swinging to his own ends.

"No, but she could get it," was Binhart's response.

"And what good would that do *me?*"

"The two of us could go up to New Orleans. We could slip in there without any one being the wiser. She could meet us. She'd bring the stuff with her. Then, when you had

the pile in your hand, I could just fade off the map."

Blake rode on again in silence.

"All right," he said at last. "I 'm willing."

"Then how 'll you prove it? How 'd I know you 'd make good?" demanded Binhart.

"That 's not up to me! You 're the man that 's got to make good!" was Blake's retort.

"But you 'll give me the chance?" half pleaded his prisoner.

"Sure!" replied Blake, as they rode on again. He was wondering how many more miles of hell he would have to ride through before he could rest. He felt that he would like to sleep for days, for weeks, without any thought of where to-morrow would find him or the next day would bring him.

It was late that day as they climbed up out of a steaming valley into higher ground that Binhart pulled up and studied Blake's face.

"Jim, you look like a sick man to me!" he declared. He said it without exultation; but

there was a new and less passive timber to his voice.

"I 've been feeling kind o' mean this last day or two," confessed Blake. His own once guttural voice was plaintive, as he spoke. It was almost a quavering whine.

"Had n't we better lay up for a few days?" suggested Binhart.

"Lay up nothing!" cried Blake, and he clenched that determination by an outburst of blasphemous anger. But he secretly took great doses of quinin and drank much native liquor. He fought against a mental lassitude which he could not comprehend. Never before had that ample machinery of the body failed him in an emergency. Never before had he known an illness that a swallow or two of brandy and a night's rest could not scatter to the four winds. It bewildered him to find his once capable frame rebelling against its tasks. It left him dazed, as though he had been confronted by the sudden and gratuitous treachery of a life-long servant.

He grew more irritable, more fanciful. He changed guides at the next native village, fearing that Binhart might have grown too intimate with the old ones. He was swayed by an ever-increasing fear of intrigues. He coerced his flagging will into a feverish watchfulness. He became more arbitrary in his movements and exactions. When the chance came, he purchased a repeating Lee-Enfield rifle, which he packed across his sweating back on the trail and slept with under his arm at night. When a morning came when he was too weak and ill to get up, he lay back on his grass couch, with his rifle across his knees, watching Binhart, always watching Binhart.

He seemed to realize that his power was slipping away, and he brooded on some plan for holding his prisoner, on any plan, no matter what it might cost.

He even pretended to sleep, to the end that Binhart might make an effort to break away —and be brought down with a bullet. He prayed that Binhart would try to go, would

give him an excuse for the last move that would leave the two of them lying there together. Even to perish there side by side, foolishly, uselessly, seemed more desirable than the thought that Binhart might in the end get away. He seemed satisfied that the two of them should lie there, for all time, each holding the other down, like two embattled stags with their horns inextricably locked. And he waited there, nursing his rifle, watching out of sullenly feverish eyes, marking each movement of the passive-faced Binhart.

But Binhart, knowing what he knew, was content to wait.

He was content to wait until the fever grew, and the poisons of the blood narcotized the dulled brain into indifference, and then goaded it into delirium. Then, calmly equipping himself for his journey, he buried the repeating rifle and slipped away in the night, carrying with him Blake's quinin and revolver and pocket-filter. He traveled hurriedly, bearing southeast towards the San Juan. Four days later he reached the coast, journeyed by boat

to Bluefields, and from that port passed on into the outer world, where time and distance swallowed him up, and no sign of his whereabouts was left behind.

XVII

IT was six weeks later that a slender-bodied young Nicaraguan known as Doctor Alfonso Sedeno (his right to that title resulting from four years of medical study in Paris) escorted into Bluefields the flaccid and attenuated shadow of Never-Fail Blake. Doctor Sedeno explained to the English shipping firm to whom he handed over his patient that the Señor Americano had been found in a dying condition, ten miles from the camp of the rubber company for which he acted as surgeon. The Señor Americano was apparently a prospector who had been deserted by his partner. He had been very ill. But a few days of complete rest would restore him. The sea voyage would also help. In the meantime, if the shipping company would arrange for credit from the hotel, the matter would assuredly be put right, later on, when the nec-

essary despatches had been returned from New York.

For three weeks of torpor Blake sat in the shadowy hotel, watching the torrential rains that deluged the coast. Then, with the help of a cane, he hobbled from point to point about the town, quaveringly inquiring for any word of his lost partner. He wandered listlessly back and forth, mumbling out a description of the man he sought, holding up strangers with his tremulous-noted inquiries, peering with weak and watery eyes into any quarter that might house a fugitive. But no hint or word of Binhart was to be gleaned from those wanderings, and at the end of a week he boarded a fruit steamer bound for Kingston.

His strength came back to him slowly during that voyage, and when he landed at Kingston he was able to walk without a stick. At Kingston, too, his draft on New York was finally honored. He was able to creep out to Constant Spring, to buy new clothes, to ride in a carriage when he chose, to eat a white man's food again. The shrunken body under

the flaccid skin slowly took on some semblance of its former ponderosity, the watery eyes slowly lost their dead and vapid stare.

And with increase of strength came a corresponding increase of mental activity. All day long he kept turning things over in his tired brain. Hour by silent hour he would ponder the problem before him. It was more rumination than active thought. Yet up from the stagnating depths of his brooding would come an occasional bubble of inspiration.

Binhart, he finally concluded, had gone north. It was the natural thing to do. He would go where his haul was hidden away. Sick of unrest, he would seek peace. He would fall a prey to man's consuming hunger to speak with his own kind again. Convinced that his enemy was not at his heels, he would hide away somewhere in his own country. And once reasonably assured that this enemy had died as he had left him to die, Binhart would surely remain in his own land, among his own people.

Blake had no proof of this. He could not

explain why he accepted it as fact. He merely wrote it down as one of his hunches. And with his old-time faith in the result of that subliminal reasoning, he counted what remained of his money, paid his bills, and sailed from Kingston northward as a steerage passenger in a United Fruit steamer bound for Boston.

As he had expected, he landed at this New England port without detection, without recognition. Six hours later he stepped off a train in New York.

He passed out into the streets of his native city like a ghost emerging from its tomb. There seemed something spectral in the very chill of the thin northern sunlight, after the opulent and oppressive heat of the tropics. A gulf of years seemed to lie between him and the actualities so close to him. A desolating sense of loneliness kept driving him into the city's noisier and more crowded drinking-places, where, under the lash of alcohol, he was able to wear down his hot ache of deprivation into a dim and dreary regretfulness. Yet the very faces about him still remained phan-

tasmal. The commonplaces of street life continued to take on an alien aspect. They seemed vague and far away, as though viewed through a veil. He felt that the world had gone on, and in going on had forgotten him. Even the scraps of talk, the talk of his own people, fell on his ear with a strange sound.

He found nothing companionable in that cañon of life and movement known as Broadway. He stopped to stare with haggard and wistful eyes at a theater front buoyed with countless electric bulbs, remembering the proud moment when he had been cheered in a box there, for in his curtain-speech the author of the melodrama of crime being presented had confessed that the inspiration and plot of his play had come from that great detective, Never-Fail Blake.

He drifted on down past the cafés and restaurants where he had once dined and supped so well, past the familiar haunts where the appetite of the spirit for privilege had once been as amply fed as the appetite of the body for food. He sought out the darker

purlieus of the lower city, where he had once walked as a king and dictated dead-lines and distributed patronage. He drifted into the underworld haunts where his name had at one time been a terror. But now, he could see, his approach no longer resulted in that discreet scurry to cover, that feverish scuttling away for safety, which marks the blacksnake's progress through a gopher-village.

When he came to Center Street, at the corner of Broome, he stopped and blinked up at the great gray building wherein he had once held sway. He stood, stoop-shouldered and silent, staring at the green lamps, the green lamps of vigilance that burned as a sign to the sleeping city.

He stood there for some time, unrecognized, unnoticed, watching the platoons of broad-chested "flatties" as they swung out and off to their midnight patrols, marking the plainly clad "elbows" as they passed quietly up and down the great stone steps. He thought of Copeland, and the Commissioner, and of his own last hour at Headquarters. And then his

thoughts went on to Binhart, and the trail that had been lost, and the task that stood still ahead of him. And with that memory awakened the old sullen fires, the old dogged and implacable determination.

In the midst of those reviving fires a new thought was fixed; the thought that Binhart's career was in some way still involved with that of Elsie Verriner. If any one knew of Binhart's whereabouts, he remembered, it would surely be this woman, this woman on whom, he contended, he could still hold the iron hand of incrimination. The first move would be to find her. And then, at any cost, the truth must be wrung from her.

Never-Fail Blake, from the obscure downtown hotel, into which he crept like a sick hound shunning the light, sent out his call for Elsie Verriner. He sent his messages to many and varied quarters, feeling sure that some groping tentacle of inquiry would eventually come in touch with her.

Yet the days dragged by, and no answer came back to him. He chafed anew at this

fresh evidence that his power was a thing of the past, that his word was no longer law. He burned with a sullen and self-consuming anger, an anger that could be neither expressed in action nor relieved in words.

Then, at the end of a week's time, a note came from Elsie Verriner. It was dated and postmarked "Washington," and in it she briefly explained that she had been engaged in Departmental business, but that she expected to be in New York on the following Monday. Blake found himself unreasonably irritated by a certain crisp assurance about this note, a certain absence of timorousness, a certain unfamiliar tone of independence. But he could afford to wait, he told himself. His hour would come, later on. And when that hour came, he would take a crimp out of this calm-eyed woman, or the heavens themselves would fall! And finding further idleness unbearable, he made his way to a drinking-place not far from that juncture of First Street and the Bowery, known as Suicide Corner. In this new-world *Cabaret de Neant* he drowned

his impatience of soul in a Walpurgis Night of five-cent beer and fusel-oil whiskey. But his time would come, he repeated drunkenly, as he watched with his haggard hound's eyes the meretricious and tragic merriment of the revelers about him—his time would come!

XVIII

BLAKE did not look up as he heard the door open and the woman step into the room. There was an echo of his old-time theatricalism in that dissimulation of stolid indifference. But the old-time stage-setting, he knew, was no longer there. Instead of sitting behind an oak desk at Headquarters, he was staring down at a beer-stained card-table in the dingy back room of a dingy downtown hotel.

He knew the woman had closed the door and crossed the room to the other side of the card-table, but still he did not look up at her. The silence lengthened until it became acute, epochal, climactic.

"You sent for me?" his visitor finally said. And as Elsie Verriner uttered the words he was teased by a vague sense that the scene had happened before, that somewhere before in

their lives it had been duplicated, word by word and move by move.

"Sit down," he said with an effort at the gruffness of assured authority. But the young woman did not do as he commanded. She remained still standing, and still staring down at the face of the man in front of her.

So prolonged was this stare that Blake began to be embarrassingly conscious of it, to fidget under it. When he looked up he did so circuitously, pretending to peer beyond the white face and the staring eyes of the young woman confronting him. Yet she ultimately coerced his unsteady gaze, even against his own will. And as he had expected, he saw written on her face something akin to horror.

As he, in turn, stared back at her, and in her eyes saw first incredulity, and then, what stung him more, open pity itself, it came home to him that he must indeed have altered for the worse, that his face and figure must have changed. For the first time it flashed over him: he was only the wreck of the man he had once been. Yet at the core of that wreck

burned the old passion for power, the ineradicable appetite for authority. He resented the fact that she should feel sorry for him. He inwardly resolved to make her suffer for that pity, to enlighten her as to what life was still left in the battered old carcass which she could so openly sorrow over.

"Well, I 'm back," he announced in his guttural bass, as though to bridge a silence that was becoming abysmal.

"Yes, you 're back!" echoed Elsie Verriner. She spoke absently, as though her mind were preoccupied with a problem that seemed inexplicable.

"And a little the worse for wear," he pursued, with his mirthless croak of a laugh. Then he flashed up at her a quick look of resentment, a look which he found himself unable to repress. "While you 're all dolled up," he said with a snort, as though bent on wounding her, "dolled up like a lobster palace floater!"

It hurt him more than ever to see that he could not even dethrone that fixed look of pity,

from her face, that even his abuse could not thrust aside her composure.

"I 'm not a lobster palace floater," she quietly replied. "And you know it."

"Then what are you?" he demanded.

"I 'm a confidential agent of the Treasury Department," was her quiet-toned answer.

"Oho!" cried Blake. "So that 's why we 've grown so high and mighty!"

The woman sank into the chair beside which she had been standing. She seemed impervious to his mockery.

"What do you want me for?" she asked, and the quick directness of her question implied not so much that time was being wasted on side issues as that he was cruelly and unnecessarily demeaning himself in her eyes.

It was then that Blake swung about, as though he, too, were anxious to sweep aside the trivialities that stood between him and his end, as though he, too, were conscious of the ignominy of his own position.

"You know where I 've been and what I 've been doing!" he suddenly cried out.

"I 'm not positive that I do," was the woman's guarded answer.

"That 's a lie!" thundered Blake. "You know as well as I do!"

"What have you been doing?" asked the woman, almost indulgently.

"I 've been trailing Binhart, and you know it! And what 's more, you know where Binhart is, now, at this moment!"

"What was it you wanted me for?" reiterated the white-faced woman, without looking at him.

Her evasions did more than anger Blake; they maddened him. For years now he had been compelled to face her obliquities, to puzzle over the enigma of her ultimate character, and he was tired of it all. He made no effort to hold his feelings in check. Even into his voice crept that grossness which before had seemed something of the body alone.

"I want to know where Binhart is!" he cried, leaning forward so that his head projected pugnaciously from his shoulders like the head of a fighting-cock.

"Then you have only wasted time in sending for me," was the woman's obdurate answer. Yet beneath her obduracy was some vague note of commiseration which he could not understand.

"I want that man, and I 'm going to get him," was Blake's impassioned declaration. "And before you get out of this room you 're going to tell me where he is!"

She met his eyes, studiously, deliberately, as though it took a great effort to do so. Their glances seemed to close in and lock together.

"Jim!" said the woman, and it startled him to see that there were actual tears in her eyes. But he was determined to remain superior to any of her subterfuges. His old habit returned to him, the old habit of "pounding" a prisoner. He knew that one way to get at the meat of a nut was to smash the nut. And in all his universe there seemed only one issue and one end, and that was to find his trail and get his man. So he cut her short with his quick volley of abuse.

"I 've got your number, Elsie Verriner, alias Chaddy Cravath," he thundered out, bringing his great withered fist down on the table top. "I 've got every trick you ever turned stowed away in cold storage. I 've got 'em where they 'll keep until the cows come home. I don't care whether you 're a secret agent or a Secretary of War. There 's only one thing that counts with me now. And I 'm going to win out. I 'm going to win out, in the end, no matter what it costs. If you try to block me in this I 'll put you where you belong. I 'll drag you down until you squeal like a cornered rat. I 'll put you so low you 'll never even stand up again!"

The woman leaned a little forward, staring into his eyes.

"I did n't expect this of you, Jim," she said. Her voice was tremulous as she spoke, and still again he could see on her face that odious and unfathomable pity.

"There 's lots of things were n't expected of me. But I 'm going to surprise you all. I 'm going to get what I 'm after or I 'm

going to put you where I ought to have put you two years ago!"

"Jim," said the woman, white-lipped but compelling herself to calmness, "don't go on like this! Don't! You 're only making it worse, every minute!"

"Making what worse?" demanded Blake.

"The whole thing. It was a mistake, from the first. I could have told you that. But you did then what you 're trying to do now. And see what you 've lost by it!"

"What have I lost by it?"

"You 've lost everything," she answered, and her voice was thin with misery. "Everything—just as they counted on your doing, just as they expected!"

"As who expected?"

"As Copeland and the others expected when they sent you out on a blind trail."

"I was n't sent out on a blind trail."

"But you found nothing when you went out. Surely you remember that."

It seemed like going back to another world,

to another life, as he sat there coercing his memory to meet the past, the abysmal and embittered past which he had grown to hate.

"Are you trying to say this Binhart case was a frame up?" he suddenly cried out.

"They wanted you out of the way. It was the only trick they could think of."

"That 's a lie!' declared Blake.

"It 's not a lie. They knew you 'd never give up. They even handicapped you—started you wrong, to be sure it would take time, to be positive of a clear field."

Blake stared at her, almost stupidly. His mind was groping about, trying to find some adequate motive for this new line of duplicity. He kept warning himself that she was not to be trusted. Human beings, all human beings, he had found, moved only by indirection. He was too old a bird to have sand thrown in his eyes.

"Why, you welched on Binhart yourself. You put me on his track. You sent me up to Montreal!"

"They made me do that," confessed the unhappy woman. "He was n't in Montreal. He never had been there!"

"You had a letter from him there, telling you to come to 381 King Edward when the coast was clear."

"That letter was two years old. It was sent from a room in the King Edward Hotel. That was part of their plant."

He sat for a long time thinking it over, point by point. He became disturbed by a sense of instability in the things that had once seemed most enduring, the sickening cataclysmic horror of a man who finds the very earth under his feet shaken by its earthquake. His sodden face appeared to age even as he sat there laboriously reliving the past, the past that seemed suddenly empty and futile.

"So you sold me out!" he finally said, studying her white face with his haggard hound's eyes.

"I could n't help it, Jim. You forced it on me. You would n't give me the chance to do anything else. I wanted to help you—but

you held me off. You put the other thing before my friendship!"

"What do *you* know about friendship?" cried the gray-faced man.

"We were friends once," answered the woman, ignoring the bitter mockery in his cry.

He stared at her, untouched by the note of pathos in her voice. There was something abstracted about his stare, as though his mind had not yet adjusted itself to a vast new discovery. His inner vision seemed dazzled, just as the eye itself may be dazzled by unexpected light.

"So you sold me out!" he said for a third time. He did not move, but under that lava-like shell of diffidence were volcanic and coursing fires which even he himself could not understand.

"Jim, I would have done anything for you, once," went on the unhappy woman facing him. "You could have saved me—from him, from myself. But you let the chance slip away. I could n't go on. I saw where it would end. So I had to save myself. I had

to save myself—in the only way I could. Oh, Jim, if you 'd only been kinder!"

She sat with her head bowed, ashamed of her tears, the tears which he could not understand. He stared at her great crown of carefully coiled and plaited hair, shining in the light of the unshaded electric-bulb above them. It took him back to other days when he had looked at it with other eyes. And a comprehension of all he had lost crept slowly home to him. Poignant as was the thought that she had seemed beautiful to him and he might have once possessed her, this thought was obliterated by the sudden memory that in her lay centered everything that had caused his failure. She had been the weak link in his life, the life which he had so wanted to crown with success.

"You welcher!" he suddenly gasped, as he continued to stare at her. His very contemplation of her white face seemed to madden him. In it he seemed to find some signal and sign of his own dissolution, of his lost power, of his outlived authority. In her seemed to

abide the reason for all that he had endured. To have attained to a comprehension of her own feelings was beyond him. Even the effort to understand them would have been a contradiction of his whole career. She only angered him. And the hot anger that crept through his body seemed to smoke out of some inner recess of his being a hate that was as unreasonable as it was animal-like. All the instincts of existence, in that moment, reverted to life's one primordial problem, the problem of the fighting man to whom every other man must be an opponent, the problem of the feral being, as to whether it should kill or be killed.

Into that unreasoning blind rage flared all the frustration of months, of years, all the disappointments of all his chase, all the defeat of all his career. Even as she sat there in her pink and white frailty she knew and nursed the secret for which he had girdled the world. He felt that he must tear it from her, that he must crush it out of her body as the pit is squeezed from a cherry. And the corroding

part of it was that he had been outwitted by a woman, that he was being defied by a physical weakling, a slender-limbed thing of ribbons and laces whose back he could bend and break across his great knee.

He lurched forward to his feet. His great crouching body seemed drawn towards her by some slow current which he could not control.

"Where 's Binhart?" he suddenly gasped, and the explosive tensity of that wheezing cry caused her to look up, startled. He swayed toward her as she did so, swept by some power not his own. There was something leonine in his movement, something leonine in his snarl as he fell on her. He caught her body in his great arms and shook it. He moved without any sense of movement, without any memory of it.

"Where 's Binhart?" he repeated, foolishly, for by this time his great hand had closed on her throat and all power of speech was beyond her. He swung her about and bore her back across the table. She did not struggle. She lay there so passive in his clutch that a

dull pride came to him at the thought of his own strength. This belated sense of power seemed to intoxicate him. He was swept by a blind passion to crush, to obliterate. It seemed as though the rare and final moment for the righting of vast wrongs, for the ending of great injustices, were at hand. His one surprise was that she did not resist him, that she did not struggle.

From side to side he twisted and flailed her body about, in his madness, gloating over her final subserviency to his will, marveling how well adapted for attack was this soft and slender column of the neck, on which his throttling fingers had fastened themselves. Instinctively they had sought out and closed on that slender column, guided to it by some ancestral propulsion, by some heritage of the brute. It was made to get a grip on, a neck like that! And he grunted aloud, with wheezing and voluptuous grunts of gratification, as he saw the white face alter and the wide eyes darken with terror. He was making her suffer. He was no longer enveloped by that mild and tragically

inquiring stare that had so discomforted him. He was no longer stung by the thought that she was good to look on, even with her head pinned down against a beer-stained card-table. He was converting her into something useless and broken, into something that could no longer come between him and his ends. He was completely and finally humiliating her. He was breaking her. He was converting her into something corrupt. . . . Then his pendulous throat choked with a falsetto gasp of wonder. *He was killing her!*

Then, as suddenly as it had come, the smoke of that mental explosion seemed to clear away. Even as he gaped into the white face so close to his own he awoke to reason. The consciousness of how futile, of how odious, of how maniacal, it all was swept over him. He had fallen low, but he had never dreamed that he could fall so low as this.

A reaction of physical nausea left him weak and dizzy. The flexor muscles of his fingers relaxed. An ague of weakness crept through his limbs. A vertiginous faintness brought

him half tumbling and half rolling back into his chair, wheezing and moist with sweat. He sat there looking about him, like a sheep killer looking up from the ewe it has captured.

Then his great chest heaved and shook with hysterical sobbing. When, a little later, he heard the shaken woman's antiphonal sobs, the realization of how low he had fallen kept him from looking at her. A great shame possessed him. He stumbled out of the room. He groped his way down to the open streets, a haggard and broken man from whom life had wrung some final hope of honor.

XIX

NO catastrophe that was mental in its origin could oppress for long a man so essentially physical as Blake. For two desolate hours, it is true, he wandered about the streets of the city, struggling to medicine his depression of the mind by sheer weariness of the body. Then the habit of a lifetime of activity reasserted itself. He felt the need of focusing his resentment on something tangible and material. And as a comparative clarity of vision returned to him there also came back those tendencies of the instinctive fighter, the innate protest against injustice, the revolt against final surrender, the forlorn claim for at least a fighting chance. And with the thought of his official downfall came the thought of Copeland and what Copeland had done to him.

Out of that ferment of futile protest arose

one sudden decision. Even before he articulated the decision he found it unconsciously swaying his movements and directing his steps. He would go and see Copeland! He would find that bloodless little shrimp and put him face to face with a few plain truths. He would confront that anemic Deputy-Commissioner and at least let him know what one honest man thought of him.

Even when Blake stood before Copeland's brownstone-fronted house, the house that seemed to wear a mask of staid discretion in every drawn blind and gloomy story, no hesitation came to him. His naturally primitive mind foresaw no difficulties in that possible encounter. He knew it was late, that it was nearly midnight, but even that did not deter him. The recklessness of utter desperation was on him. His purpose was something that transcended the mere trivialities of everyday intercourse. And he must see him. To confront Copeland became essential to his scheme of things.

He went ponderously up the brown stone

steps and rang the bell. He waited patiently until his ring was answered. It was some time before the door swung open. Inside that door Blake saw a solemn-eyed servant in a black spiked-tailed service-coat and gray trousers.

"I want to see Mr. Copeland," was Blake's calmly assured announcement.

"Mr. Copeland is not at home," answered the man in the service-coat. His tone was politely impersonal. His face, too, was impassive. But one quick glance seemed to have appraised the man on the doorstep, to have judged him, and in some way to have found him undesirable.

"But this is important," said Blake.

"I 'm sorry, sir," answered the impersonal-eyed servant. Blake made an effort to keep himself in perfect control. He knew that his unkempt figure had not won the good-will of that autocratic hireling.

"I 'm from Police Headquarters," the man on the doorstep explained, with the easy mendacity that was a heritage of his older days.

He produced the one official card that remained with him, the one worn and dog-eared and once water-soaked Deputy-Commissioner's card which still remained in his dog-eared wallet. "I 've got to see him on business, Departmental business!"

"Mr. and Mrs. Copeland are at the Metropolitan, sir," explained the servant. "At the Opera. And they are not back yet."

"Then I 'll wait for him," announced Blake, placated by the humbler note in the voice of the man in the service-coat.

"Very good, sir," announced the servant. And he led the way upstairs, switching on the electrics as he went.

Blake found himself in what seemed to be a library. About this softly hung room he peered with an acute yet heavy disdain, with an indeterminate envy which he could not control. It struck him as being feminine and over fine, that shadowy room with all its warm hangings and polished wood. It stood for a phase of life with which he had no patience. And he kept telling himself that it had not

been come by honestly, that on everything about him, from the silver desk ornaments to the marble bust glimmering out of its shadowy background, he himself had some secret claim. He scowled up at a number of signed etchings and a row of diminutive and heavily framed canvases, scowled up at them with quick contempt. Then he peered uncomfortably about at the shelves of books, mottled streaks of vellum and morocco stippled with gold, crowded pickets of soft-lettered color which seemed to stand between him and a world which he had never cared to enter. It was a foolish world, that world of book reading, a lackadaisical region of unreality, a place for women and children, but never meant for a man with a man's work to do.

His stolidly contemptuous eyes were still peering about the room when the door opened and closed again. There was something so characteristically guarded and secretive in the movement that Blake knew it was Copeland even before he let his gaze wheel around to the newcomer. About the entire figure, in

fact, he could detect that familiar veiled wariness, that enigmatic and self-concealing cautiousness which had always had the power to touch him into a quick irritation.

"Mr. Blake, I believe," said Copeland, very quietly. He was in full evening dress. In one hand he held a silk hat and over one arm hung a black top-coat. He held himself in perfect control, in too perfect control, yet his thin face was almost ashen in color, almost the neutral-tinted gray of a battle-ship's side-plates. And when he spoke it was with the impersonal polite unction with which he might have addressed an utter stranger.

"You wished to see me!" he said, as his gaze fastened itself on Blake's figure. The fact that he remained standing imparted a tentativeness to the situation. Yet his eyes remained on Blake, studying him with the cold and mildly abstracted curiosity with which he might view a mummy in its case.

"I do!" said Blake, without rising from his chair.

"About what?" asked Copeland. There

was an acidulated crispness in his voice which hinted that time might be a matter of importance to him.

"You know what it 's about, all right," was Blake's heavy retort.

"On the contrary," said Copeland, putting down his hat and coat, "I 'm quite in the dark as to how I can be of service to you."

Both his tone and his words angered Blake, angered him unreasonably. But he kept warning himself to wait, to hold himself in until the proper moment arrived.

"I expect no service from you," was Blake's curtly guttural response. He croaked out his mirthless ghost of a laugh. "You 've taught me better than that!"

Copeland, for all his iciness, seemed to resent the thrust.

"We have always something to learn," he retorted, meeting Blake's stolid stare of enmity.

"I guess I 've learned enough!" said Blake.

"Then I hope it has brought you what you

are looking for!" Copeland, as he spoke, stepped over to a chair, but he still remained on his feet.

"No, it has n't brought me what I 'm after," said the other man. "Not yet! But it 's going to, in the end, Mr. Copeland, or I 'm going to know the reason why!"

He kept warning himself to be calm, yet he found his voice shaking a little as he spoke. The time was not yet ripe for his outbreak. The climactic moment was still some distance away. But he could feel it emerging from the mist just as a pilot sights the bell-buoy that marks his changing channel.

"Then might I ask what you are after?" inquired Copeland. He folded his arms, as though to fortify himself behind a pretense of indifferency.

"You know what I 've been after, just as I know what you 've been after," cried Blake. "You set out to get my berth, and you got it. And I set out to get Binhart, to get the man your whole push could n't round up—and I 'm going to get him!"

"Blake," said Copeland, very quietly, "you are wrong in both instances."

"Am I!"

"You are," was Copeland's answer, and he spoke with a studious patience which his rival resented even more than his open enmity. "In the first place, this Binhart case is a closed issue."

"Not with me!" cried Blake, feeling himself surrendering to the tide that had been tugging at him so long. "They may be able to buy off you cuff-shooters down at Headquarters. They may grease your palm down there, until you see it pays to keep your hands off. They may pull a rope or two and make you back down. But nothing this side o' the gates o' hell is going to make *me* back down. I began this man-hunt, and *I 'm going to end it!*"

He took on a dignity in his own eyes. He felt that in the face of every obstacle he was still the instrument of an ineluctable and incorruptible Justice. Uncouth and buffeted as his withered figure may have been, it still represented the relentlessness of the Law.

"That man-hunt is out of our hands," he heard Copeland saying.

"But it 's not out of *my* hands!" reiterated the detective.

"Yes, it 's out of your hands, too," answered Copeland. He spoke with a calm authority, with a finality, that nettled the other man.

"What are you driving at?" he cried out.

"This Binhart hunt is ended," repeated Copeland, and in the eyes looking down at him Blake saw that same vague pity which had rested in the gaze of Elsie Verriner.

"By God, it 's not ended!" Blake thundered back at him.

"It *is* ended," quietly contended the other. "And precisely as you have put it—Ended by God!"

"It 's what?" cried Blake.

"You don't seem to be aware of the fact, Blake, that Binhart is dead—dead and buried!"

Blake stared up at him.

"Is what?" his lips automatically inquired.

"Binhart died seven weeks ago. He died

in the town of Toluca, out in Arizona. He 's buried there."

"That 's a lie!" cried Blake, sagging forward in his chair.

"We had the Phœnix authorities verify the report in every detail. There is no shadow of doubt about it."

Still Blake stared up at the other man.

"I don't believe it," he wheezed.

Copeland did not answer him. He stepped to the end of the desk and with his scholarly white finger touched a mother-of-pearl bell button. Utter silence reigned in the room until the servant answered his summons.

"Bridley, go to my secretary and bring me the portfolio in the second drawer."

Blake heard and yet did not hear the message. A fog-like sense of unreality seemed to drape everything about him. The earth itself seemed to crumble away and leave him poised alone in the very emptiness of space. Binhart was dead!

He could hear Copeland's voice far away. He could see the returning figure of the serv-

ant, but it seemed as gray and ghostlike as the entire room about him. In his shaking fingers he took the official papers which Copeland handed over to him. He could read the words, he could see the signatures, but they seemed unable to impart any clear-cut message to his brain. His dazed eyes wandered over the newspaper clippings which Copeland thrust into his unsteady fingers. There, too, was the same calamitous proclamation, as final as though he had been reading it on a tombstone. Binhart was dead! Here were the proofs of it; here was an authentic copy of the death certificate, the reports of the police verification; here in his hands were the final and indisputable proofs.

But he could not quite comprehend it. He tried to tell himself it was only that his old-time enemy was playing some new trick on him, a trick which he could not quite fathom. Then the totality of it all swept home to him, swept through his entire startled being as a tidal-wave sweeps over a coast-shoal.

Blake, in his day, had known desolation, but

it had seldom been desolation of spirit. It had never been desolation like this. He tried to plumb it, to its deepest meaning, but consciousness seemed to have no line long enough. He only knew that his world had ended. He saw himself as the thing that life had at last left him—a solitary and unsatisfied man, a man without an aim, without a calling, without companionship.

"So this ends the music!" he muttered, as he rose weakly to his feet. And yet it was more than the end of the music, he had to confess to himself. It was the collapse of the instruments, the snapping of the last string. It was the ultimate end, the end that proclaimed itself as final as the stabbing thought of his own death itself.

He heard Copeland asking if he would care for a glass of sherry. Whether he answered that query or not he never knew. He only knew that Binhart was dead, and that he himself was groping his way out into the night, a broken and desolate man.

XX

SEVERAL days dragged away before Blake's mental clarity returned to him. Then block by unstable block he seemed to rebuild a new world about him, a new world which was both narrow and empty. But it at least gave him something on which to plant his bewildered feet.

That slow return to the substantialities of life was in the nature of a convalescence. It came step by languid step; he knew no power to hurry it. And as is so often the case with convalescents, he found himself in a world from which time seemed to have detached him. Yet as he emerged from that earlier state of coma, his old-time instincts and characteristics began to assert themselves. Some deep-seated inner spirit of dubiety began to grope about and question and challenge. His innate skepticism once more became active.

That tendency to cynical unbelief which his profession had imposed upon him stubbornly reasserted itself. His career had crowned him with a surly suspiciousness. And about the one thing that remained vital to that career, or what was left of it, these wayward suspicions arrayed themselves like wolves about a wounded stag.

His unquiet soul felt the need of some final and personal proof of Binhart's death. He asked for more data than had been given him. He wanted more information than the fact that Binhart, on his flight north, had fallen ill of pneumonia in New Orleans, had wandered on to the dry air of Arizona with a "spot" on his lungs, and had there succumbed to the tubercular invasion for which his earlier sickness had laid him open. Blake's slowly awakening and ever-wary mind kept telling him that after all there might be some possibility of trickery, that a fugitive with the devilish ingenuity of Binhart would resort to any means to escape being further harassed by the Law.

Blake even recalled, a few days later, the incident of the Shattuck jewel-robbery, during the first weeks of his régime as a Deputy Commissioner. This diamond-thief named Shattuck had been arrested and released under heavy bail. Seven months later Shattuck's attorney had appeared before the District Attorney's office with a duly executed certificate of death, officially establishing the fact that his client had died two weeks before in the city of Baltimore. On this he had based a demand for the dismissal of the case. He had succeeded in having all action stopped and the affair became, officially, a closed incident. Yet two months later Shattuck had been seen alive, and the following winter had engaged in an Albany hotel robbery which had earned for him, under an entirely different name, a nine-year sentence in Sing Sing.

From the memory of that case Never-Fail Blake wrung a thin and ghostly consolation. The more he brooded over it the more morosely disquieted he became. The thing grew like a upas tree; it spread until it obsessed all

his waking hours and invaded even his dreams. Then a time came when he could endure it no more. He faced the necessity of purging his soul of all uncertainty. The whimpering of one of his unkenneled "hunches" merged into what seemed an actual voice of inspiration to him.

He gathered together what money he could; he arranged what few matters still remained to engage his attention, going about the task with that valedictory solemnity with which the forlornly decrepit execute their last will and testament. Then, when everything was prepared, he once more started out on the trail.

. . . . .

Two weeks later a rough and heavy-bodied man, garbed in the rough apparel of a mining prospector, made his way into the sun-steeped town of Toluca. There he went quietly to the wooden-fronted hotel, hired a pack-mule and a camp-outfit and made purchase, among other things, of a pick and shovel. To certain of the men he met he put inquiries as to the best trail out to the Buenavista Copper

Camp. Then, as he waited for the camp-partner who was to follow him into Toluca, he drifted with amiable and ponderous restlessness about the town, talking with the telegraph operator and the barber, swapping yarns at the livery-stable where his pack-mule was lodged, handing out cigars in the wooden-fronted hotel, casually interviewing the town officials as to the health of the locality and the death-rate of Toluca, acquainting himself with the local undertaker and the lonely young doctor, and even dropping in on the town officials and making inquiries about main-street building lots and the need of a new hotel.

To all this amiable and erratic garrulity there seemed to be neither direction nor significance. But in one thing the town of Toluca agreed; the ponderous-bodied old newcomer was a bit "queer" in his head.

A time came, however, when the newcomer announced that he could wait no longer for his belated camp-partner. With his pack-mule and a pick and shovel he set out, late one afternoon, for the Buenavista Camp. Yet by

nightfall, for some strange reason, any one traveling that lonely trail might have seen him returning towards Toluca. He did not enter the town, however, but skirted the outer fringe of sparsely settled houses and guardedly made his way to a close-fenced area, in which neither light nor movement could be detected. This silent place awakened in him no trace of either fear or repugnance. With him he carried his pick and shovel, and five minutes later the sound of this pick and shovel might have been heard at work as the ponderous-bodied man sweated over his midnight labor. When he had dug for what seemed an interminable length of time, he tore away a layer of pine boards and released a double row of screw-heads. Then he crouched low down in the rectangular cavern which he had fashioned with his spade, struck a match, and peered with a narrow-eyed and breathless intentness at what faced him there.

One glance at that tragic mass of corruption was enough for him. He replaced the screw-heads and the pine boards. He took up his

shovel and began restoring the earth, stolidly tramping it down, from time to time, with his great weight.

When his task was completed he saw that everything was orderly and as he had found it. Then he returned to his tethered pack-mule and once more headed for the Buena-vista Camp, carrying with him a discovery which made the night air as intoxicating as wine to his weary body.

Late that night a man might have been heard singing to the stars, singing in the midst of the wilderness, without rhyme or reason. And in the midst of that wilderness he remained for another long day and another long night, as though solitude were necessary to him, that he might adjust himself to some new order of things, that he might digest some victory which had been too much for his shattered nerves.

On the third day, as he limped placidly back into the town of Toluca, his soul was torn between a great peace and a great hunger. He hugged to his breast the fact that somewhere

in the world ahead of him a man once known as Binhart still moved and lived. He kept telling himself that somewhere about the face of the globe that restless spirit whom he sought still wandered.

Day by patient day, through the drought and heat and alkali of an Arizona summer, he sought some clue, some inkling, of the direction which that wanderer had taken. But about Binhart and his movements, Toluca and Phœnix and all Arizona itself seemed to know nothing.

Nothing, Blake saw in the end, remained to be discovered there. So in time the heavy-bodied man with the haggard hound's eyes took his leave, passing out into the world which in turn swallowed him up as completely as it had swallowed up his unknown enemy.

XXI

THREE of the busiest portions of New York, varying with the various hours of the day, may safely be said to lie in that neighborhood where Nassau Street debouches into Park Row, and also near that point where Twenty-third Street intercepts Fourth Avenue, and still again not far from where Broadway and Fifth Avenue meet at the southeast corner of Madison Square.

About these three points, at certain hours of the day and on certain days of the week, an observant stranger might have noticed the strangely grotesque figure of an old cement seller. So often had this old street-peddler duly appeared at his stand, from month to month, that the hurrying public seemed to have become inured to the grotesqueness of his appearance. Seldom, indeed, did a face turn to inspect him as he blinked out at the lighted

street like a Pribiloff seal blinking into an Arctic sun. Yet it was only by a second or even a third glance that the more inquisitive might have detected anything arresting in that forlornly ruminative figure with the pendulous and withered throat and cheek-flaps.

To the casual observer he was merely a picturesque old street-peddler, standing like a time-stained statue beside a carefully arrayed exhibit of his wares. This exhibit, which invariably proved more interesting than his own person, consisted of a frame of gas-piping in the form of an inverted U. From the top bar of this iron frame swung two heavy pieces of leather cemented together. Next to this coalesced leather dangled a large Z made up of three pieces of plate glass stuck together at the ends, and amply demonstrating the adhesive power of the cementing mixture to be purchased there.

Next to the glass Z again were two rows of chipped and serrated plates and saucers, plates and saucers of all kinds and colors, with holes drilled in their edges, and held together

like a suspended chain-gang by small brass links. At some time in its career each one of these cups and saucers had been broken across or even shattered into fragments. Later, it had been ingeniously and patiently glued together. And there it and its valiant brothers in misfortune swung together in a double row, with a cobblestone dangling from the bottom plate, reminding the passing world of remedial beneficences it might too readily forget, attesting to the fact that life's worst fractures might in some way still be made whole.

Yet so impassively, so stolidly statuesque, did this figure stand beside the gas-pipe that to all intents he might have been cemented to the pavement with his own glue. He seldom moved, once his frame had been set up and his wares laid out. When he did move it was only to re-awaken the equally plethoric motion of his slowly oscillating links of cemented glass and chinaware. Sometimes, it is true, he disposed of a phial of his cement, producing his bottle and receiving payment with the absorbed impassivity of an automaton.

Huge as his figure must once have been, it now seemed, like his gibbeted plates, all battered and chipped and over-written with the marks of time. Like his plates, too, he carried some valiant sense of being still intact, still stubbornly united, still oblivious of every old-time fracture, still bound up into personal compactness by some power which defied the blows of destiny.

In all seasons, winter and summer, apparently, he wore a long and loose-fitting overcoat. This overcoat must once have been black, but it had faded to a green so conspicuous that it made him seem like a bronze figure touched with the mellowing *patina* of time.

It was in the incredibly voluminous pockets of this overcoat that the old peddler carried his stock in trade, paper-wrapped bottles of different sizes, and the nickels and dimes and quarters of his daily trafficking. And as the streams of life purled past him, like water past a stone, he seemed to ask nothing of the world on which he looked out with such deep-set and

impassive eyes. He seemed content with his lot. He seemed to have achieved a Nirvana-like indifferency towards all his kind.

Yet there were times, as he waited beside his stand, as lethargic as a lobster in a fish-peddler's window, when his flaccid, exploring fingers dug deeper into one of those capacious side-pockets and there came in contact with two oddly shaped wristlets of polished steel. At such times his intent eyes would film, as the eyes of a caged eagle sometimes do. Sometimes, too, he would smile with the half-pensive Castilian smile of an uncouth and corpulent Cervantes.

But as a rule his face was expressionless. About the entire moss-green figure seemed something faded and futile, like a street-lamp left burning after sunrise. At other times, as the patrolman on the beat sauntered by in his authoritative blue stippled with its metal buttons, the old peddler's watching eyes would wander wistfully after the nonchalant figure. At such times a meditative and melancholy intentness would fix itself on the faded old face,

and the stooping old shoulders would even unconsciously heave with a sigh.

As a rule, however, the great green-clad figure with its fringe of white hair—the fringe that stood blithely out from the faded hat brim like the halo of some medieval saint on a missal—did not permit his gaze to wander so far afield.

For, idle as that figure seemed, the brain behind it was forever active, forever vigilant and alert. The deep-set eyes under their lids that hung as loose as old parchment were always fixed on the life that flowed past them. No face, as those eyes opened and closed like the gills of a dying fish, escaped their inspection. Every man who came within their range of vision was duly examined and adjudicated. Every human atom of that forever ebbing and flowing tide of life had to pass through an invisible screen of inspection, had in some intangible way to justify itself as it proceeded on its unknown movement towards an unknown end. And on the loose-skinned and haggard face, had it been studied closely

enough, could have been seen a vague and wistful note of expectancy, a guarded and muffled sense of anticipation.

Yet to-day, as on all other days, nobody stopped to study the old cement-seller's face. The pink-cheeked young patrolman, swinging back on his beat, tattooed with his ash night-stick on the gas-pipe frame and peered indifferently down at the battered and gibbeted crockery.

"Hello, Batty," he said as he set the exhibit oscillating with a push of the knee. "How 's business?"

"Pretty good," answered the patient and guttural voice. But the eyes that seemed as calm as a cow's eyes did not look at the patrolman as he spoke.

He had nothing to fear. He knew that he had his license. He knew that under the faded green of his overcoat was an oval-shaped street-peddler's badge. He also knew, which the patrolman did not, that under the lapel of his inner coat was a badge of another shape and design, the badge which season by season

the indulgent new head of the Detective Bureau extended to him with his further privilege of a special officer's license. For this empty honor "Batty" Blake—for as "Batty" he was known to nearly all the cities of America—did an occasional bit of "stooling" for the Central Office, a tip as to a stray yeggman's return, a hint as to a "peterman's" activities in the shopping crowds, a whisper that a till tapper had failed to respect the Department's dead-lines.

Yet nobody took Batty Blake seriously. It was said, indeed, that once, in the old régime, he had been a big man in the Department. But that Department had known many changes, and where life is unduly active, memory is apt to be unduly short.

The patrolman tapping on the gas-pipe arch with his idle night-stick merely knew that Batty was placid and inoffensive, that he never obstructed traffic and always carried a license-badge. He knew that in damp weather Batty limped and confessed that his leg pained him a bit, from an old hurt he 'd had in the East.

And he had heard somewhere that Batty was a sort of Wandering Jew, patroling the whole length of the continent with his broken plates and his gas-pipe frame and his glue-bottles, migrating restlessly from city to city, striking out as far west as San Francisco, swinging round by Denver and New Orleans and then working his way northward again up to St. Louis and Chicago and Pittsburgh.

Remembering these things the idle young "flatty" turned and looked at the green-coated and sunken-shouldered figure, touched into some rough pity by the wordless pathos of an existence which seemed without aim or reason.

"Batty, how long 're yuh going to peddle glue, anyway?" he suddenly asked.

The glue-peddler, watching the crowds that drifted by him, did not answer. He did not even look about at his interrogator.

"D' yuh *have* to do this?" asked the wide-shouldered youth in uniform.

"No," was the peddler's mild yet guttural response.

The other prodded with his night-stick

against the capacious overcoat pockets. Then he laughed.

"I'll bet yuh 've got about forty dollars stowed away in there," he mocked. "Yuh have now, have n't yuh?"

"I don' know!" listlessly answered the sunken-shouldered figure.

"Then what 're yuh sellin' this stuff for, if it ain't for money?" persisted the vaguely piqued youth.

"I don' know!" was the apathetic answer.

"Then who does?" inquired the indolent young officer, as he stood humming and rocking on his heels and swinging his stick by its wrist-thong.

The man known as Batty may or may not have been about to answer him. His lips moved, but no sound came from them. His attention, apparently, was suddenly directed elsewhere. For approaching him from the east his eyes had made out the familiar figure of old McCooey, the oldest plain-clothes man who still came out from Headquarters to "pound the pavement."

And at almost the same time, approaching him from the west, he had caught sight of another figure.

It was that of a dapper and thin-faced man who might have been anywhere from forty to sixty years of age. He walked, however, with a quick and nervous step. Yet the most remarkable thing about him seemed to be his eyes. They were wide-set and protuberant, like a bird's, as though years of being hunted had equipped him with the animal-like faculty of determining without actually looking back just who might be following him.

Those alert and wide-set eyes, in fact, must have sighted McCooey at the same time that he fell under the vision of the old cement seller. For the dapper figure wheeled quietly and quickly about and stooped down at the very side of the humming patrolman. He stooped and examined one of the peddler's many-fractured china plates. He squinted down at it as though it were a thing of intense interest to him.

As he stooped there the humming patrolman

was the witness of a remarkable and inexplicable occurrence. From the throat of the huge-shouldered peddler, not two paces away from him, he heard come a hoarse and brutish cry, a cry strangely like the bawl and groan of a branded range-cow. At the same moment the gigantic green-draped figure exploded into sudden activity. He seemed to catapult out at the stooping dapper figure, bearing it to the sidewalk with the sheer weight of his unprovoked assault.

There the struggle continued. There the two strangely diverse bodies twisted and panted and writhed. There the startlingly agile dapper figure struggled to throw off his captor. The arch of gas-pipe went over. Glue-bottles showered amid the shattered glass and crockery. But that once placid-eyed old cement seller struck to the unoffending man he had so promptly and so gratuitously attacked, stuck to him as though he had been glued there with his own cement. And before the patrolman could tug the combatants apart, or even wedge an arm into the fight,

the exulting green-coated figure had his enemy on his back along the curb, and, reaching down into his capacious pocket, drew out two oddly shaped steel wristlets. Forcing up his captive's arm, he promptly snapped one steel wring on his own wrist, and one on the wrist of the still prostrate man.

"What 're yuh tryin' to do?" demanded the amazed officer, still tugging at the great figure holding down the smaller man. In the encounter between those two embattled enemies had lurked an intensity of passion which he could not understand, which seemed strangely akin to insanity itself.

It was only when McCooey pushed his way in through the crowd and put a hand on his shoulder that the old cement seller slowly rose to his feet. He was still panting and blowing. But as he lifted his face up to the sky his body rumbled with a Jove-like sound that was not altogether a cough of lungs overtaxed nor altogether a laugh of triumph.

"I got him!" he gasped.

About his once placid old eyes, which the

hardened tear-ducts no longer seemed able to drain of their moisture, was a look of exultation that made the gathering street-crowd take him for a panhandler gone mad with hunger.

"Yuh got *who?*" cried the indignant young officer, wheeling the bigger man about on his feet. As the cement seller, responding to that tug, pivoted about, it was noticeable that the man to whom his wrist was locked by the band of steel duly duplicated the movement. He moved when the other moved; he drew aside when the other drew aside, as though they were now two parts of one organism.

"I got him!" calmly repeated the old street-peddler.

"Yuh got *who?*" demanded the still puzzled young patrolman, oblivious of the quiescent light in the bewildered eyes of McCooey, close beside him.

"Binhart!" answered Never-Fail Blake, with a sob. *"I 've got Binhart!"*

THE END

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